WINNIFREDS JEWELS

W. SMALL

WINIFRED'S JEWELS.

BY

MARY ATHERSTONE BIRD.

UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY. LOS ANGELES

PHILADELPHIA:
H. N. McKINNEY & CO.,
725 SANSOM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1874, by
H. N. McKINNEY & CO.,
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

FREDA AND FREDDIE..... 7

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOL LIFE..... 15

CHAPTER III.

FREDDIE'S PUNISHMENT..... 23

CHAPTER IV.

CIRCUS LIFE..... 37

CHAPTER V.

GILBERT BRACEBRIDGE..... 52

CHAPTER VI.

LORD TYTHERLEIGH..... 61

CHAPTER VII.

THE EARL'S DISCOVERY..... 71

2125572

CHAPTER VIII.

ELLEN TREVANIAN'S DEATH..... 85

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE..... 96

CHAPTER X.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR..... 102

CHAPTER XI.

FREDDIE AGAIN AT SCHOOL..... 113

CHAPTER XII.

OUT IN A STORM..... 125

CHAPTER XIII.

FREDDIE DREAMS..... 135

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFIDENCES..... 144

CHAPTER XV.

BROUGHT TO BAY..... 157

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXIT, AND AN ENTRANCE..... 168

CHAPTER XVII.

FREDDIE'S SKELETON IN THE CLOSET..... 174

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUDDEN MOVEMENTS..... 185

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY..... 194

CHAPTER XX.

LIFE IN THE SOUTH..... 206

CHAPTER XXI.

HORSE DEALING..... 219

CHAPTER XXII.

A TRAP IS LAID FOR FREDDIE..... 228

CHAPTER XXIII.

FREDDIE'S TWIN BROTHER..... 234

CHAPTER XXIV.

A KU-KLUX PLOT..... 241

CHAPTER XXV.

A NIGHT ATTACK..... 252

CHAPTER XXVI.

FRIENDLY ADVICE..... 263

CHAPTER XXVII.

KU-KLUX LAW..... 271

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE INDIAN BOW..... 279

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE JOURNEY..... 286

CHAPTER XXX.

DISCOVERIES..... 292

CHAPTER XXXI.

EXPLANATIONS..... 301

CHAPTER XXXII.

FREDA'S VOW..... 308

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FREDDIE'S CONFESSION..... 314

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE JEWEL CASE IS OPENED..... 321

CHAPTER XXXV.

GILBERT'S JOURNEY..... 327

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PANDORA'S BOX..... 334

WINIFRED'S JEWELS.

CHAPTER I.

FREDA AND FREDDIE.

On the first of May, 1846, two children were born into this world. They were both girls; each was the only child of her young parents; and both received the rather uncommon given name of Winifred.

In every other respect their destinies were as different as they well could be, though they were fated at a distant period to meet and exercise a powerful influence upon each other. One was born in India, the daughter of a dashing officer of high family, though but moderate fortune.

The father of the other child was a lawyer's clerk, living in a small house in a London suburb.

The little Anglo-Indian, whom her parents called Freda, was a lovely, fairy-like creature, gifted with that pure and perfect, yet seemingly fragile beauty which so often accompanies high birth.

The London child was chiefly remarkable for the

extreme vigor and robustness of her constitution, and the pranks which her overflowing vitality led her to perform. Such a tomboy was she, that her father called her Freddie in joke, until the name stuck to her in earnest.

Having introduced my two heroines, I shall leave Freda to grow up in her luxurious Indian home, the almost spoiled pet of her doting parents and the idol of the regiment, while I follow the more adventurous life that fell to the lot of Freddie.

The first event that had a marked effect upon her life was the occupation of the adjoining house by a family which was connected with Astley's Amphitheatre. The father was a gymnast and acrobat; his wife was a "star rider;" and their four boys, the youngest of whom was three years older than Freddie, were all training up in their father's profession.

With these boys Freddie quickly formed a strong friendship; and though she was but six years old, she speedily learned from them to scale the six-foot wall which divided the little back gardens belonging to the respective houses, and thenceforward became a constant sharer in their sports, and especially in their exercises, which she looked upon as the most delightful sports of all.

Her mother having ascertained by personal observation that the lads were well-behaved, and that their language, though not the purest grammatically, was free from all coarseness or vulgarity, offered no opposition to this growing intimacy, for she had

often felt that her little girl was too much secluded from the companionship of other children.

Thus matters went on for three years. At that period Mr. Wilson, Freddie's father, rendered a very important service to his employer, by which he prevented his being swindled out of a sum that would have left him a beggar in his old age. In gratitude for this act, Mr. Mason increased the salary of his faithful clerk, and furthermore urged him to say if there was anything else by which he could prove the esteem in which he held him.

"There is one thing, sir," replied Wilson, with sparkling eyes, "that I should regard as the very greatest favor; but I fear it would be too much to ask."

"I would refuse you nothing unless upon very imperative reasons," said Mr. Mason, "and I don't think you would want anything unreasonable. So tell me frankly what it is."

"Well, sir, then it is just this," said the clerk. "Ever since my little girl was born I have laid by a small sum every year to insure her thirty pounds a year from the date of my death till she is twenty-one. This was to make sure that she shall have the means of going to school without distressing her mother. Then you see, sir, my wife may die too, and in that case, what would become of our poor child? I don't know whether you are aware of it, sir," added Wilson, "but my wife and I were both brought up in the Foundling Hospital, and we have neither of us a relation in the world that we know of. And it is

singular that we have no intimate friends; so there's not one person I could safely leave to manage matters for my little girl if we should be taken from her, unless I might make bold to ask you, sir, to take charge of her little income, and send her to a good school."

"Draw out your will, my dear fellow," said the lawyer, with a good-natured laugh, "and appoint me guardian and trustee to your little maiden. It will satisfy you, and it wont cost me any trouble. You are now about thirty, are you not?"

"Thirty-three, sir."

"Well, a strong man of thirty-three is not likely to give a feeble man of sixty any trouble about carrying out the provisions of his will. I wish you had asked me something that would have been of real benefit to you."

"I think, sir, it is a real benefit to have one's mind quite at ease," returned the clerk, with an air of so much satisfaction that his employer could not gainsay his assertion.

Wilson made his will that afternoon, and hurried home to tell his wife the gratifying news of his employer's kindness. Mr. Mason retired to his comfortable bachelor chambers, and forgot all about it.

A few more months passed away, and one morning Wilson failed to appear at the usual hour. Such an occurrence was unprecedented, and everybody in the office began to fear he must have met with some accident. In the course of the morning a short note from Mrs. Wilson informed Mr. Mason that her

husband was sick, and that it was feared his malady was small-pox. She added that she had sent her little daughter to an acquaintance at Hampstead without letting her see her father, for fear of infection, and gave him the address.

Mr. Mason saw his faithful clerk no more. His daily inquiries were answered with reports of his progress from bad to worse, ending with his death. In a week more Mrs. Wilson followed her husband.

Then the good lawyer faithfully executed his trust. He left the child with her new friends till the bitterness of her grief was past; then sent for her to his office in order to make her acquaintance, and took her himself to a good school, forty miles from town, where the kind, motherly proprietress promised to take the entire charge of her, and keep her during the vacations for the thirty pounds yearly, which formed her sole fortune.

Five happy years flew by, during which Freddie became a tall, graceful girl, with much more than the usual amount of intellectual training, due partly to her own excellent abilities and love of learning, and partly to those long quiet vacations spent almost wholly in the society of the refined and highly cultured Mrs. Tyler.

An event then occurred which once more effected an entire change in the orphan's life. This was the death of her second mother, Mrs. Tyler. The school was sold, and Freddie, as a sort of fixture, passed with it into the hands of the purchaser.

Mr. Mason was suffering under a severe attack of

sickness at this time, and could do no more than acquiesce in the transfer. When he got better, he wrote to his ward requesting her to inform him if she was at all dissatisfied with the change, in which case he would remove her to another school. But this letter never reached Freddie's hands.

Miss Crabtree had her own reasons for suppressing it; for the high-spirited girl, accustomed to be ruled only by kindness and reason, had more than once revolted against the many petty rules and regulations that had been introduced under the new *régime*, and such encouragement as Mr. Mason's letter afforded would probably have elicited an open expression of her discontent.

Without some strong inducement, it was very improbable that Freddie would venture to make any complaint to her almost unknown guardian. She had never seen him since he left her in Mrs. Tyler's care; for, being a bachelor living in chambers in the Temple, he had no home to which a young girl could be invited during the holidays, and though he often intended running down to see how "poor Wilson's little child" got on, yet Mrs. Tyler's accounts of her welfare were so entirely satisfactory, that he suffered more urgent business to detain him, until he fell into a confirmed habit of not going to see her.

This apparent lack of interest, and the formal stereotyped message which always accompanied the quarterly remittance, that "he hoped she was a good child, and learnt her lessons carefully," had a very repelling effect upon Freddie, and caused her to

entertain towards her guardian a sentiment of awe and almost of dread, which his real kindness little merited.

Had she been able to look into the old gentleman's thoughts for one moment, she would have been much amused, and freed from every vestige of fear or embarrassment in her relations with him. The fact was that Mr. Mason, having no children of his own, did not take in the idea that the little girl of nine must, in the course of six years, have become almost a young woman, and therefore she was still, to him, only "poor Wilson's little child;" and what could a little child care for a visit from an old man like himself? From this delusion resulted the formal quarterly message, bidding her be a good girl; and when he wrote to her direct, after Miss Crabtree purchased the school, he took great pains to form every letter with the utmost precision, and to use the simplest language, so that the *little child* should have no difficulty in reading and understanding what he wrote.

Though Miss Crabtree suppressed this letter, she took care that Freddie should appear to answer it.

"Miss Wilson," she said, the day after its arrival, "instead of writing an exercise to-day, I desire you to write a letter to your guardian, and tell him how happy you are, and how well you are progressing with your studies."

"But I am not at all happy, ma'am," replied Freddie; "how can I be happy so soon after dear Mrs. Tyler's death?"

"It is very becoming in you to regret the loss of your kind friend," said Miss Crabtree, in the tone of cut-and-dried blandness that was peculiar to her; "but you must not suffer your feelings to make you negligent of your duty to your guardian. You can tell him that, with the exception of your grief for the loss of your late excellent preceptress, you are comfortable and happy, and have nothing to desire. Write as I tell you, my love, and show your letter to me. I should be sorry if Mr. Mason discovered an error, however slight, in either your orthography or composition."

Freddie did as she was bidden, and Mr. Mason was quite satisfied. Her letter caused him much amazement, however, and he exhibited it to his head clerk as a most wonderful performance for a child of that age.

"What age, sir?" was the reply. "It appears to me to be nothing very remarkable. Wilson's daughter was nine years old when he died, that's six years ago, so she must be fifteen now."

"Bless my soul! She *must* be fifteen! And I have always thought of her as the little girl I took down to Mrs. Tyler's. It is quite amazing! I'll go and see her as soon as I am better in health and less harassed by business."

And so, once more, the visit that might have changed the whole course of Freddie's life, was put off indefinitely.

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOL LIFE.

UNDER Miss Crabtree's stringent rule, the girls were deprived of many little indulgences to which they had been accustomed during Mrs. Tyler's life. In particular, their dietary was much reduced, and the abundant supply of fruit which the large garden afforded was sent to market instead of furnishing their table with pies, and the most wholesome of all food, ripe fruit.

The appetite of school boys is proverbial; but healthy school girls will compare favorably with their brothers in this, as in many other respects. The girls were often hungry, and furthermore, they looked upon themselves as the victims of tyranny and oppression. None felt this more keenly than Freddie, because she had lived the longest under more genial government; and she became the ring-leader in a series of exploits that were entirely contrary to order and discipline.

Many were the surreptitious feasts of fruit, cake, or pies, held during play hours, or in the large dormitory after the vigilant Crabtree had retired to rest; and Freddie was always mistress of the revels. She

it was who coaxed the cook to smuggle in the contraband articles, collected the subscriptions, decided on the quality of the treat, and presided over the distribution.

It was in the spring that Miss Crabtree came to the school, and for several months the girls carried on their pranks without discovery. It is a long lane, however, that has no turning, and towards the end of the summer her suspicions were, by some means, aroused.

One night, as the clock struck twelve, an awful apparition might have been seen gliding with noiseless step through the long passage that led to the upper dormitory, which was occupied by twelve of the elder girls, Freddie being one of the number. The apparition was tall and straight as a slat, and with about as much beauty of outline. It was draped from head to foot in a scanty white garment, and carried a lighted candle in its hand. Little of the face was visible except a long, sharp nose, and a pair of small, twinkling eyes, around which radiated a dense array of curl papers, with their twisted ends standing out in all directions. These were surrounded and surmounted by a night-cap, with many starched and fluted frills, and an immense spreading crown, which gave the spectre's head the appearance of being considerably larger than any other part of its figure, and by adding several inches to its apparent height, imparted to it a grotesque and somewhat terrific appearance. This was Miss Crabtree on the war path.

Within the dormitory all was eagerness and active preparation. Two of the girls held lighted candles, and all had plates and spoons in readiness.

Freddie had just made the first incision into a large plum pie. None of your little shallow plates, with an under crust that absorbs all the juice; but a regular English pie, made in a deep dish capable of holding two or three quarts of the ripe fruit, and almost overflowing with the rich crimson fluid.

At this moment an alarm was given: "Miss Crabtree was coming!"

Freddie popped the pie into the nearest place of concealment—an open bed—not reflecting on the probable consequences.

The occupant of this bed was a dull, inert girl of German descent, by name Gertrude Thudichum. She was generally slow and heavy in her movements; but under any extraordinary excitement had been known to perform feats of awkward activity that amazed her schoolfellows.

Freddie had no sooner deposited the *corpus delicti* in Miss Thudichum's bed, and taken a flying leap into her own, than by the last flash of the rapidly extinguished candles she saw the consequences of her act.

By one of her extraordinary efforts, Miss Thudichum leaped backwards into her bed, and went—*plump*—into the pie!

In a moment all was still as the tomb, except a smothered gurgling sound from Freddie, who was nearly stifled by the violent efforts she made to sup-

press a burst of laughter; and when the grotesque apparition already described glided into the room, and commenced an inspection of the different beds, poor Freddie's risibility amounted almost to agony. Involuntarily she uttered a low, tremulous groan.

The sound reached Miss Crabtree's ears. She hastened to the spot whence it proceeded, and as she came to Miss Thudichum's bed, what a sight met her view! There, upon the white coverlet, lay a blood-stained knife, while a stream of crimson fluid trickled from the bed and formed a pool upon the floor!

She raised a series of such unearthly yells that all the girls started up in their beds, eagerly inquiring what was the matter, and the servants, in a distant part of the house, were roused from sleep, and rushing upon the scene, added their cries and high-raised voices to the confusion. In the midst of all, Freddie's ringing peals of laughter formed a strange chorus to the wailings of dismay.

Miss Thudichum, meanwhile, lay with closed eyes and immovable features, looking as calm as though she were really sleeping the sleep of innocence, or of death.

The cook, who had good reasons for suspecting the truth of the matter, took up the knife, smelled it, tasted the red fluid with which it was stained, and observed:

"Law, ma'am, that aint blood; that's plum-juice."

Still Miss Thudichum stirred not a muscle, and all the girls, except Freddie, suddenly subsided into

their beds, and slept like dormice. As for Freddie, she laughed louder than ever.

"Plum juice!" cried Miss Crabtree; "*plum juice!* Then what is this?" pointing to the pool on the floor.

Investigation proved what it was. Miss Thudichum was with difficulty roused from sleep, and sate up rubbing her eyes and blinking at the light in the most natural manner possible.

When sharply questioned by Miss Crabtree concerning her complicity in the crime of smuggling a pie into the dormitory, she looked placidly at the woful *débris* of the feast, acknowledged that it seemed to have been a pie, and added that she had not seen any one put it there, and did not know who had done it, but supposed some one must have done it for fun.

"Miss Thudichum," said the school-mistress, severely. "I greatly fear you are prevaricating. How could you lie there, *in the very middle of that pie*, without being aware of it?"

"I felt something odd," replied the young lady, with an air of the utmost simplicity. "But how could I see what it was in the dark?"

Another burst of laughter drew the attention of the wrathful principal upon the delinquent Freddie.

"*You* evidently know all about this disgraceful business, Miss Wilson. Will you cease your unseemly merriment, and tell me *at once*, and without any falsehoods, what this all means?"

"I'll tell you all about myself—*I* put the pie

there," gasped Freddie; "and Miss Thudichum jumped right into the very middle of it. Ho! ho! ho!"

"Will you stop this giggling?" cried Miss Crabtree, sharply, and the more sharply as she saw that the cook and housemaid had great difficulty to preserve their gravity. "So Miss Thudichum knew it was there, did she?"

"Why, no; of course not. Would she have gone into the very middle of it, if she had known it was there? She's not to blame. *I* put it there, and she—Ha! ha! ha!"

And again Freddie rolled her head upon her pillow, and laughed till it seemed she could laugh no more.

"Compose yourself, Miss Wilson. I *insist* upon it," said Miss Crabtree, with increased acerbity. "And tell me, on your peril, who else was concerned in this most disgraceful business?"

"Miss Crabtree," replied Freddie, with a successful effort to be serious, "I will tell you everything that concerns myself, but not one word that can throw the blame upon any one else. I acknowledge that I had that pie; I began to cut it, and when I heard you coming, I put it in Miss Thudichum's bed, and she—and she—and she—"

Freddie was determined not to weaken the force of her confession by unseasonable merriment, and finding it utterly impossible even to allude to Miss Thudichum's disaster with a serious face, she gasped, and stopped short.

"You may think yourself very determined, Miss Wilson, but I flatter myself that I can make you speak the truth, notwithstanding all your impudence and obstinacy. It is too late to take any measures with you to-night, but you may prepare yourself for very severe treatment to-morrow, unless you think well to tell me the *whole* truth, and nothing but the truth."

Miss Crabtree would not diminish the terror of this awful threat by adding another word, and stalked in silence from the room.

"Oh, doesn't she look like a pair of tongs out on a ramble?" exclaimed the irrepressible Freddie, as soon as the door closed behind the spectre.

"Oh, for shame, Miss Wilson!" cried the cook, as a suppressed giggle ran through the room. "You might have set us all laughing out loud, and got us all into trouble. I'm sure *I* must have laughed out if it hadn't been for grieving over what will be done to you to-morrow."

"Shall you tell about us?" demanded one girl.

"Nothing shall make me. I promise you that."

"But suppose she should whip you?" suggested another.

"If she tries that once, she wont do it a second time," replied Freddie, with a smile of conscious superiority. "I'll never submit to be flogged."

"I wonder whether she means to punish us all," said one, who was not remarkable for courage.

"Not she," replied Freddie; "she'll be glad enough to let you all off with a lecture, because you all have

influential friends. But as somebody ought to be punished for the sake of discipline, she'll make a scapegoat of me, because I have no friends."

"Oh, what a shame!" cried a chorus of young voices.

"Don't fret about it, girls," responded the indomitable Freddie. "She dare not kill me, and she shall not beat me; and she can't deprive me of the fun of seeing little Thud going with such a thud into that pie. Oh! it's fifty times better than having eaten the pie. That would have been soon forgotten, but the recollection of Thuddy's jump will be a joy forever. How *did* you do it, Thuddy? And what a little hypocrite you were to sham sleep so cleverly!"

"I didn't know what else to do," said quiet little Miss Thudichum, nestling down into her bed, which the two women had made up with clean sheets while this conversation was going on; "and it was about the best I could have done, after all."

"Good night, young ladies, and mind you go to sleep quickly; there's dears," said the cook, as she retreated.

They all followed her parting injunction; but Freddie's dreams were frequently disturbed by visions of Miss Thudichum taking impracticable leaps into all sorts of utterly impossible places.

CHAPTER III.

FREDDIE'S PUNISHMENT.

A CONSCIOUSNESS of power always imparts courage to its possessor. The martyr knows he can support torture for righteousness' sake, and smiles upon the inventions of his persecutors. Even the consciousness of possessing unusual physical strength inspires an amount of courage beyond what persons of weaker muscle possess. Thus it was that Freddie was enabled to treat all Miss Crabtree's threats of vengeance and punishment with silent contempt. Her early training with her young acrobatic playmates had developed in her a degree of muscular power which was perfectly marvellous, and as she increased in years and stature, so did her strength of body. She made no boast of it, for the fact was that the poor child was ashamed of being so unfeminine, and concealed her natural gift with as much solicitude as though it had been a crime. Now, for the first time in her life, she rejoiced in her abounding vigor and activity, as she thought of the ease with which she would overpower her tyrannical school-mistress, should she venture to threaten her with a whip.

She stretched her tall lithe figure, and clenched

her small firm hands, and felt that she was mistress of the situation.

As soon as prayers were over, on the morning after the adventure of the pie, Miss Crabtree solemnly summoned Freddie to her desk.

"Miss Wilson," she began, with the most awe-inspiring air and voice that she could command; "are you prepared to divulge the names of your accomplices in the disgraceful proceedings of last night?"

"No, ma'am," replied Freddie, firmly, yet modestly. "I will answer every question you choose to ask about myself; but I will say nothing about any other person."

"How did you come by that pie?"

"I came by it honestly. It was paid for, and the money passed through my hands. I can say nothing more about it."

"Did my cook make it for you?"

"That is a question which I cannot answer, Miss Crabtree. If I were to tell you the name of every person who did *not* make it, you would easily discover who *did* make it; and that I intend to conceal."

"Am I to understand that you are *determined* to make no further disclosures?" asked Miss Crabtree, turning white with rage.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Freddie, respectfully, "unless they relate to myself."

"Then come with me to my parlor. I will not disgrace you publicly before your companions."

All the girls turned frightened glances at each

other, and tears started in many young eyes, as Miss Crabtree stalked majestically out of the room, followed without any show of reluctance by Freddie, who cast back on them as she went a glance as expressive of contempt for all that might be in store for her, as she dared venture on in presence of the other teachers.

Arrived in her private parlor, Miss Crabtree took in her hand a long and supple switch, prepared for the occasion.

"Once more, I give you the option, Miss Wilson," she said, in a voice that shook with anger, "of giving up the names of your accomplices, or of baring your back to the waist, and receiving the chastisement that your obstinacy merits."

"Miss Crabtree," said Freddie, looking her full in the face, and speaking in a quiet and respectful tone, "I will neither betray my friends, nor suffer myself to be flogged."

"Take off your dress this moment!" screamed the vindictive woman, losing all self-command, and shaking the switch close to the girl's face.

Freddie never flinched, but she took the switch from Miss Crabtree's hand without the slightest effort, twisted it into a small compass (it was too tough to break), and put it into the fire.

Livid with passion, and oblivious of all decency or self-respect, the school-mistress flew upon her pupil and tried to tear her face and hair with her long nails. Freddie easily kept her off with one hand, while she completed the destruction of the

switch. Then she imprisoned both the virago's hands, and held them quietly, till she ceased her vociferations, and the young girl had a chance of being heard.

"I do not wish to treat you with any disrespect, Miss Crabtree," she said, "but you must not scratch my face. If you will promise not to touch me, I will let you go."

"Let me go," she gasped out. "I'll not touch you again, I promise you. Let me go—you frighten me. You must be a man in disguise!"

"Oh, no! I am only a little stronger than most girls, and you are very weak, ma'am. Now tell me what punishment you mean to impose upon me, and I will submit to it quietly, so long as it is not whipping."

Miss Crabtree, though the strange girl released her hands, felt herself wholly subdued; yet roused herself to exert an appearance of authority.

"You are to be locked in the lumber attic till you consent to speak the truth," she said, though with an inward dread of being again successfully set at defiance. But Freddie only bowed her graceful head, and asked humbly if she might be allowed to continue her studies while she remained there.

"All that you can, conveniently," replied Miss Crabtree, glad to make any concessions that might lure the wild creature into her prison. "Your music lessons you must necessarily forego; but I trust you will come to your senses in a day or two, so the loss

will not be great. Your books shall be sent up to you."

Freddie courtseyed in the formal fashion which Miss Crabtree's notions of etiquette demanded of her scholars on entering or quitting her presence, and bounded up stairs to her place of imprisonment as lightly as a midshipman under sentence would run up to the mast-head.

"Well!" she said to herself, as she surveyed the premises, "there will be some credit in 'being jolly under these circumstances,' but with Mark Tapley's example before me, I think I shall manage it."

It was a long room with a ceiling sloping on each side to within a few feet of the floor; in the centre it was lofty, and three large beams crossed it, midway between the floor and the apex of the roof. Upon these the young prisoner looked with much complacency, as furnishing the foundation for a gymnasium.

"I'll not die or grow stupid for want of exercise," she said, half aloud; "in fact, I think I shall rather enjoy my captivity, if she don't keep me in *too* long."

Forthwith she set to work to make her habitation as comfortable as possible, by arranging the miscellaneous articles of furniture that were piled in disorder on every side, and especially by opening the two dormer windows.

While she was thus occupied, Miss Crabtree made her appearance, followed by the housemaid, who brought a slice of bread and a cup of milk and water for the prisoner's breakfast. They retired, and

Freddie laughed on hearing the key turned in the lock. She ate her breakfast contentedly, and again set to work to tidy up her prison room.

A few hours later Miss Crabtree and her satellite returned.

"Are you prepared to tell me the names of your accomplices, Miss Wilson?" demanded the schoolmistress, with less austerity than she had before used in addressing her recalcitrant pupil.

"I should be very glad to oblige you, Miss Crabtree," replied Freddie, with a coolness that Mr. Midshipman Easy might have envied, "but I cannot do so. It would be quite contrary to my ideas of honor."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Miss Crabtree. "Make up Miss Wilson's bed, Jane. You are a witness that it is entirely her own fault and her own choice that she remains here."

Freddie helped to make her bed with most provoking alacrity, and when Jane began to set the place in order, she begged her not to trouble herself, as it would afford her occupation and amusement to do it herself; but she requested to have the requisite household utensils for giving it a good cleaning.

Jane looked for orders to her mistress.

"Let her have them," responded that lady, as she quitted the room with an overpowering sense of her utter inability to cope with the indomitable spirit she had undertaken to subdue.

Freddie's imprisonment lasted for two weeks; during which time she had practised gymnastics to

such good purpose, that her health was unimpaired, while her remarkable strength was greatly increased.

Her release was the result of no humiliating submission on her part, but was effected by a manœuvre of Miss Crabtree's own contriving. Finding that Freddie's resolution was invincible, she began to be fearful of the consequences, if it should become publicly known that she had kept one of her pupils so long under confinement. She, therefore, by a little skilful insinuation gave one of the teachers to understand, that if all the girls were to present to her a petition expressive of their own repentance for any share they might have had in Freddie's offence, and praying for their companion's pardon, she might be prevailed upon to give it a favorable consideration. The teacher no sooner gave a hint to one of the elder girls that she thought such a petition would obtain Freddie's pardon, than the idea flew like lightning through the school.

The important document was drawn up, signed, and presented in due form. Miss Crabtree pretended to require time to ponder well before granting their wishes, and after keeping them in suspense for about an hour, she caused Freddie to be conducted to the school-room, where she delivered a long lecture to them in a body, without mentioning Freddie in particular, pardoned them *en masse*, and swept out of the room with an assumption of dignified superiority that was exactly in inverse proportion to her consciousness of having sneaked out of a very degrading predicament.

From this time Freddie's life was embittered by every petty annoyance that a small and malignant nature could invent.

Miss Crabtree did not venture on any open act of oppression; but she had the power of making the poor girl feel that she was always under a cloud of suspicion. Freddie often felt uncomfortable and unhappy; and on one occasion this feeling urged her to write to her guardian, and ask him if he would remove her to another school. She received no answer, for the excellent reason that her letter never found its way to the post-office, but was quietly consigned to Miss Crabtree's fire.

Miss Crabtree's malice went so far as even to endeavor, by underhand means, to prevent Freddie's accompanying the rest of the girls to witness the performances at a travelling circus. Her wiles, however, were overthrown, for this visit was a "breaking-up" treat given by the wealthy parents of one of her pupils, who would take no excuses for the absence of even one of the number.

This performance was a source of intense delight to Freddie, for it brought back vividly to her recollection the merry times she had spent in attempting such feats with her young neighbors, which her grief for her parents' death, and the subsequent quiet, studious life of the school, had almost obliterated from her memory. She almost longed for a second period of imprisonment, that she might try to imitate some of the daring achievements of the arena. She consoled herself with the thought that the

Christmas vacation was close at hand, when, if she was not invited to accompany one of the girls to her home, which had sometimes happened, she would steal up into the attic when the Crabtree was out of the way, and practise to her heart's content.

But Miss Crabtree had other intentions respecting the disposal of her time, which would materially interfere with these designs.

She declined an invitation for Freddie to spend the holidays with Miss Thudichum's family, but kept her ulterior intentions in the dark till all the girls were gone to their homes. The next day the housemaid left, and the cook told Freddie that she too was going by the end of the week. That evening Miss Crabtree summoned Freddie to her parlor.

"Close the door, Miss Wilson, and sit down; I wish to have a little conversation with you," began the schoolmistress, in a dry, business-like tone. "Have you any idea what arrangement was made between Mr. Mason and Mrs. Tyler respecting the expense of keeping you during the vacations?"

"I believe, ma'am, it was understood that I was to remain here all the time, and that Mrs. Tyler considered what Mr. Mason pays for me was to include everything."

"It is only thirty pounds a year," said Miss Crabtree; "and it was barely sufficient when you were a little child. Now that you are older, and, of course, eat more, and require more material for your clothes, it is not by any means enough, even without the expense of keeping you through the holidays."

"Why did you not let me go to Mrs. Thudichum's?" exclaimed Freddie, half reproachfully.

"I had my reasons," replied Miss Crabtree, biting her thin lips. "It is a very unfortunate thing for a young girl to commence life by being dependent upon charity, and I had reason to know that Mrs. Thudichum invited you merely out of compassion."

Freddie's brow flushed, and she looked what she felt—deeply mortified. But she said nothing.

"Now, I have in my possession," continued Miss Crabtree, "the letters which Mr. Mason wrote to Mrs. Tyler upon the subject at the time you were placed here, and I will read to you what he says." She took a letter from the table and read:

"'As the sum, which is all that I am empowered to offer for the young lady's board and education (including her clothing and her maintenance during the holidays), is very moderate, you will be perfectly justified in doing as you suggest, and making her useful in the school as soon as she is sufficiently advanced for her services to be of any value to you.'

"I require you to say, Miss Wilson, whether you have hitherto been of any service to me."

"Only in teaching the junior class, ma'am," faltered Freddie.

"A mere trifle, not worth naming," said Miss Crabtree, superciliously, "and of more advantage to yourself than to me. But there is now an opportunity for you to make yourself really useful, and that at a time when you are not engaged in studies of any kind. It is very desirable that every young woman

should be acquainted with household management and work in all its branches, and I mean to employ you in such light work as will be required while there are only two in the family, until such time as I can replace my cook and housemaid, who are leaving me."

"Will you not first write to my guardian, ma'am, and ask if he would approve of my being employed in menial work?" asked Freddie, almost choking.

"This letter is quite sufficient authority," replied Miss Crabtree.

"But he says there that I am to be made useful *in the school*," persisted Freddie.

"And, I take it, *this* is the school, Miss," retorted the principal, tartly. "Mr. Mason is in very bad health, and is now on the continent travelling, so any application to him would be too late. I give you the option of earning your bread honestly; but if you refuse my orders, I shall dismiss you from the school. I am not bound to keep you; and where will you go, I should like to know? Where *can* you go? Unless, indeed, you can stoop to going to Mrs. Thudichum's, or elsewhere, *as a beggar*—a suppliant for their *charity!*"

"I will not do that, ma'am," replied the girl, with great humility. "I will ask cook to teach me as much as I can learn about cookery before she goes, and I will do the best I can."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Miss Crabtree. "Then from to-morrow morning you will begin to keep the house in good order. It will not hurt

you. I am sure you are strong enough. You may now retire to bed. Good night."

"Good night, ma'am," said Freddie, as she withdrew, apparently quite subdued.

"I have broken her spirit!" thought Miss Crabtree, with inward triumph. "I have crushed out all her pride! And I will trample on her more as I go on. How I hate that girl!"

"The best I can," whispered Freddie, as she ascended the stairs. "Yes, I must do the best I can; and I think that will be the best. I can't stay here, anyhow, and I wont go a-begging."

What this best thing was that had come into her mind like an inspiration, and prompted her apparent submission to Miss Crabtree's tyrannical orders, came to light in due course.

Meanwhile she performed her new work with cheerfulness and alacrity, though she was more thoughtful than usual. She took regular instructions in cooking, and promised to become a first-rate maid of all work.

Miss Crabtree was completely thrown off her guard, and ceased to watch over her intercourse with the cook as jealously as she had done at first.

"Cook," said Freddie, the evening before that functionary's departure, "will you do me a great kindness?"

"Why, Miss Wilson, darling, don't you know I'll do anything in this world for you? Haven't I lived in this very house with you ever since you was brought here? And didn't we both love the dear

angel that's gone to a better world, and that was so kind to us while she was mistress here? And don't I see how you are put upon by this old crab-apple? As if *you* was made to do hard work like a servant."

"What I have done wont kill me," replied Freddie, cheerfully. "Now, you must promise me, first of all, never to say one word *to anybody* of what I am going to ask you to do for me."

"My blessed child, you may reckon upon me. I promise you, solemnly."

"Then I want you to give me an old dress and ten shillings for my new merino, and an old bonnet for my new hat, and your red tartan shawl for my gray one. Don't ask me any questions, but just say yes or no. But remember, if you say *yes*, it will save me from—from—well I may as well say it right out —it may save me from drowning myself."

There was a depth of emotion in the poor girl's voice and manner that carried conviction to the woman's kind soul.

"I'll do it," she said, hurriedly; "yes, I'll do it. But what if Miss Crabtree should have me taken up for stealing?"

"Never fear," said Freddie, confidently; "she'll not do that, for she will never find it out. Oh, thank you, dear Susan! Thank you a thousand times! Bring the things to my room the first thing in the morning, and I'll have the others ready for you."

On the night of the second day from this, Freddie, dressed in the clothes thus obtained, and with a bun-

dle on her back, quietly let herself out by a side door, and quitted forever the house that had been her home for so many years.

Miss Crabtree "moved heaven and earth," to use her own expression, in her efforts to trace and recover the fugitive; but all in vain. Freddie had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her in its depths.

CHAPTER IV.

CIRCUS LIFE.

In the deserted tap-room of a small inn, situated in the outskirts of a manufacturing town, about ninety miles distant from Miss Crabtree's seminary, sat a man, of some sixty years of age, sipping a glass of gin and water, and gazing gloomily into the embers of the expiring fire.

He was somewhat corpulent, and not over clean in his general appearance. His clothes were shabby, his shirt front was soiled and rumpled, his hair was matted and unkempt, and his bloated features and blood-shot, lack-lustre eyes would have told a keen observer that he was too much addicted to the use of the baneful stimulant he was imbibing.

A showy posting bill that hung on the smoky wall announced the performances of Powell's Grand Circus, and some hastily scribbled pencil memoranda that lay at his elbow on the table referred to the receipts for the evening's performance, concluded about an hour ago. This was, in fact, no other than Mr. Powell himself, the proprietor and manager of the circus.

"Muster Powle, here's a young 'ooman wants to

see yer," said a slip-shod woman, looking into the room.

"What does she want?" demanded the person addressed, looking wearily up from his contemplation of the fire.

"Don't know. She says she wants to see yer very particular."

"Ask her to come to-morrow," he said, turning again to the almost empty grate.

"Please, sir, let me speak to you to-night," said a fresh, young voice, the owner whereof now entered unbidden. "I have come a long way to see you, and I shall be so disappointed if you put me off till to-morrow."

She was a neat looking girl, plainly dressed, and with a bundle tied to her back.

"Well, well," said the manager, with a feeble smile, "sit down and tell me what you want. But if you want me to help you with money, my poor lass, you have come to the wrong shop. Business is very bad—very bad, indeed; never was worse."

"I am very sorry to hear you say that, sir; not because I want you to lend me anything, but—I should like you to be well off."

"That's very kind of you," he answered, with a rather brighter smile. "Come to the fire—such a fire as there is—and tell us all about it. Can't you afford us a few more coals, Molly?"

"Well, I don't know, Muster Powle," said the woman. "We be shut up now, you see, and custo-

mers is all turned out for the night; but, well, I s'pose I must."

She brought a small quantity of coal and a few sticks, which soon roused the feeble fire into a blaze.

"If I were superstitious," said the manager, "I should feel inclined to hope that your coming forboded some improvement in my fortunes, young woman. I have been comparing this dying fire to my own life, going out and fading away for want of fuel. And then you come in, and there's a blaze we've got!"

"I hope your presentiment may be fulfilled, sir," said the visitor, laying down her bundle, and drawing near the fire, "for I want you to give me an engagement in your company."

"What can you do?" asked Mr. Powell.

"I don't know; but I can soon learn."

"*That* wont do. My funds are too low to allow of my taking any new beginners. Have you been engaged in any company already?"

"No, sir; I have only practised in private."

"That can't amount to much. Where do you come from?"

"I don't wish to answer any questions, Mr. Powell," replied the girl; "so please don't ask me any. You must be satisfied with knowing that I have no relations, and that no person has any claim upon me. I was very badly treated by a person who was paid to take care of me, and so I left her."

"But, my girl, the person who paid for you must have had some claims on you."

"Oh, yes, sir, he would if he had been alive; but it was my father, who left a little money to pay for bringing me up, and he died many years ago; and then the lady who took care of me died too, and I fell into the hands of another person, a stranger, who ill-treated me, and I will never go back to her. And that is all I can tell you."

"What induced you to come to me?" asked Mr. Powell.

"I once saw your company perform."

"Where?" he inquired hastily, hoping to discover something more about her.

"I can't tell you that, sir. It was some time ago; but I saw in a paper that you were here, and so I came. If you wont engage me, I must go to some other manager."

"I don't want you to do that," he said. "You are very young, and might fall into bad hands. What *can* you do?"

"I can do several things that I saw your people do; and then I am very strong."

"A girl's strength," he repeated, with good-humored contempt.

"But just try me, sir. You have no idea how strong I am. I believe I am as strong as most men."

"Can you bend that arm?" said the manager, rising, and extending his right arm, which notwithstanding his intemperate habits and advanced age, was still remarkably muscular.

The girl pressed one hand in the hollow of the

elbow, took a firm hold of his clenched fist, and doubled up the strong limb, with an effort, indeed, but without any very violent exertion.

"Whew!" whistled the manager, in amazement, "it's hard if something cannot be made of you. But surely you must be a boy in disguise. Take off your bonnet; let me see your face."

A pretty, blushing, very intelligent young face was disclosed to his view when the bonnet was removed, and his suspicion respecting her sex was instantly dispelled, while his hopes of "making something of her" rose proportionately high.

Trial after trial of her astonishing strength and activity was made by the delighted manager. His praises inspired her, and she forgot the fatigue of her long and hurried march; she forgot the insults and cruelty that had driven her from her only place of shelter; she forgot that she was friendless and alone in the world; and thought only of future triumphs.

More fatigued than herself, he at length gave over, after having promised again and again, that she should have the best possible instruction and training, to place her at the head of the profession, a position which she merited in every respect.

"And now, my dear, tell me your name," he said.

"I suppose I must make up a name," she replied, pretending to consider deeply a question on which she had already made up her mind. "If my real name were Frederica, my pet name might be Freddie, and that would do very well to keep up the uncer-

tainty about my being a boy or a girl. But mind, I don't say that my name *is* Frederica."

"I'll ask no more about it, for I don't want to know," he said, laughing. "I don't want to be obliged to give you back to your friends. So I'll get my glass filled again, and one for you, my girl, and we'll drink 'success to the old circus,' and I'll drink a health to Freddie the nondescript."

But Freddie put her hand upon the glass, and looked at him beseechingly. "Please don't, Mr. Powell," she said; "and as for me, I would not taste the horrid smelling stuff on any account. You'll be so much better without it, and would you not be richer if you never took it?"

"I believe you are right, Freddie. I *know* you are. It is an infernal habit that I have fallen into, but I'll try, I will indeed, to get the better of it."

He looked regretfully at the empty glass, notwithstanding his profession of future reform; but that young pleading face overcame the unhealthful craving, and he went to bed without a further indulgence in the baneful vice which had made, and still kept him a poor man.

Apart from this one besetting sin, the manager possessed many good qualities; and though he had become slovenly in appearance, and even careless of personal neatness and cleanliness, his language and manners bore unmistakable evidence of his having once been a gentleman.

From the first, he felt a strong interest in Freddie, which further acquaintance ripened into an attach-

ment so powerful, that had she totally failed in her public performances, he would have retained her with him, and shared with her his last sixpence.

No such sacrifice was needed, however, for Freddie took the public by storm, and the empty coffers of the impoverished company were rapidly filled. Her first appearance took place after very short preparation, on account of the manager's bankrupt condition, and was confined to an exhibition of feats of strength. Her youth and beauty, united to such almost miraculous physical power, excited unbounded admiration, and on the second night a large number of applicants could not obtain admission.

A few more performances enabled the manager to rest for a while, and give the neophyte a course of training. She was so apt and courageous a pupil that she soon became expert as a rider, while the characters she assumed were Protean. Whether as the goddess Diana, the very embodiment of the celebrated antique statue, or as a sailor boy dancing a hornpipe, she was equally charming.

Billets-doux, and costly presents of jewelry were showered upon her; but these were invariably intercepted by the careful manager. The former he threw into the fire, and the latter he returned in her name to the donors, if they could be discovered; and if sent anonymously, he sold them and placed the proceeds in a bank, in the name of Freddie Powell.

The young girl, in the meanwhile, lived a happy, childish life, unsullied by the vicious surroundings of the arena, and unconscious of the libertine glances

that followed and feasted on her graceful movements. She enjoyed the active motion; she enjoyed the applause that followed enthusiastically upon every feat; she rejoiced in her success; but most of all, she was delighted to see the improvement that took place in her adopted father, and his approbation was her crowning glory.

Mr. Powell was so careful of her, and excluded with such jealous watchfulness everything which might contaminate her perfect purity, or even arouse her vanity, whether it came in the form of passionate solicitations from without, or coarse language or unmeasured admiration and praise from those engaged with her in the circus, that at the end of three years Freddie was quite as innocent, and as ignorant of the vices of the world, as she would have been had she passed the whole period at school.

For her sake the manager became careful in his dress and personal appearance. For her sake he punished with instant dismissal, any violation of decency in language among his subordinates. For her sake he strove hard to vanquish his one grievous failing, and succeeded so far that he was only occasionally overcome by what we must, in charity, call the malady of intemperance. When this occurred, he would hide himself as much as possible from his adopted child, by going to bed and pretending to suffer from a violent headache.

This artifice succeeded once or twice, but Freddie speedily found out the real nature of these attacks, and her saddened countenance and averted eyes re-

proached him more powerfully than the loudest remonstrances could have done.

He knew, besides, that while he was unable to guard her, she was left open to the attacks of her enemies. Once he was much alarmed by finding that she had received a letter containing a diamond ring of great beauty and value, during one of his attacks. It was some relief to learn that this had been sent by a lady—presumably of high rank—with an urgent request that the graceful young athlete would meet her at a time and place which she appointed, and afford her the pleasure of becoming personally acquainted with *him;* for Freddie's sex was still a mystery with the public.

Freddie regarded this as an excellent joke, and wished much to meet her "lady-love," as she called her, in either her masculine or feminine character; but this was so strongly opposed by her old friend, that she yielded to his judgment, and even consented to wear the ring only in private.

At the end of three years, while Freddie was in the midst of a most successful and triumphant engagement in London, Mr. Powell was struck down by a dangerous attack of sickness.

Freddie threw up her engagement to attend upon him, and passed day and night by his bedside. Her strength and patience were sorely tried, but seemed inexhaustible.

The doctors at length pronounced the case to be hopeless, and advised him to prepare for death.

"My will is made," he replied, calmly; "and I

have no care nor anxiety in the world, except about this child. I must talk with her alone."

"Do not let yourself be troubled on my account, dear father," said Freddie, in the deepest distress. "I can always earn my living, thanks to your teaching. Don't heed what the doctors say. Keep quiet, and go to sleep. Perhaps you will get well again, after all."

A faint smile passed over the sick man's face.

"The doctors have done their best, my child," he said; "and they are not to blame if they could not save me. But I *know* there is no hope for me. Good-bye, doctor. Don't feel hurt at what this poor girl said in her grief."

"Not at all—not at all," replied the doctor. "I will remain with you longer, if you wish it, Mr. Powell; or if you or your daughter desire to see me again, you have only to send for me, and I will come."

He pocketed his fee, and departed.

"Freddie," said the dying manager, eagerly turning towards her, "I have a great load of anxiety on my mind, and only you can remove it."

"Tell me what I can do, father, and I will do it."

"I have never asked you a question concerning your family, or friends, or former position in life, since the night you first came to me, in a dress which I knew did not belong to your real rank. On my deathbed, you owe it to me to clear up this mystery. But I also have a confession to make to you, and perhaps if I begin, you will find it easier

to tell me your history. Lock the door, my child, and look round the room to see that no one is listening."

Freddie obeyed, and when she was once more seated by his side, he continued:

"I can tell my own sad tale in very few words; because, for the sake of others, I must not enter into particulars. Upwards of thirty years ago, I was a prosperous London merchant. I had a wife and children whom I dearly loved. The failure of another firm threatened me with instant ruin. God knows it was not to save myself that I yielded to the temptation of doing wrong. Could I but stave off the difficulty for a time, I was convinced I could recover myself, and save my family from poverty. I committed a forgery. Other losses prevented me from keeping it a secret by meeting the bill when it became due. I was tried, and sentenced to a long term of transportation. I escaped from the convict settlement in such a way that I was supposed to be dead. I wandered about in different parts of the world, and earned some money by hard toil in the gold fields. My appearance was so changed that I ran no risk of discovery, and besides that, a man who has money is seldom an object of suspicion. After twenty years I saw my wife again; but not to speak to her. She was married to another man, and had another family of children. I would not ask a question of any one, lest my identity should be suspected; but I examined a file of the *Times* newspaper, from the period of my trial. There I saw

that my youngest child, my only son, had died in infancy. Then I saw an account of my own death. Some years later came the notice of my wife's second marriage; and more recently still, the marriage of my three daughters. I have seen, since then, notices of the births of many grandchildren, not one of whom must I ever hold in my arms! Not one of whom will ever call me grandpapa! It is foolish of me to feel this so deeply," continued the old man, wiping the fast-flowing tears from his eyes; "but sometimes it seems almost more than I can bear. It was this that first drove me to seek consolation and forgetfulness in drink. I have tried hard to overcome that vice for your sake, my child—whom I have loved more than you may have supposed, my Freddie! But it has been a hard, hard struggle, and I have often been vanquished in it. Can you forgive me, child?"

"Oh, don't talk about forgiveness!" sobbed Freddie. "I know how you have striven, and how ashamed you have felt afterwards; and I have been so sorry for you, poor dear, for I saw that you had some sorrow gnawing at your heart that you would not tell to any one."

"Yes—it has generally been after reading of the birth of one of those little grandchildren whom I must never see, that the grief and misery have been too strong for me. Only to think of that! *Never* see them. Never, never, never!"

He sunk into a kind of doze as he murmured the last word. But suddenly rousing himself, he ex-

claimed, with brightening eyes: "Yes—there are some of them that I shall soon see! Three dear little ones are waiting for me on the other side, and my own boy, too, and they will not be ashamed to recognize their old grandfather. But, Freddie, I am forgetting you, and I shall not rest in my grave if I leave you unprotected. Tell me who you are."

"My name is Winifred Wilson," she replied, conquering her emotion, and telling her story as succinctly as possible. "My father died when I was nine years old, and left me to the care of a lawyer, who took me to a school, and left me there without seeing me again. My first school-mistress was very kind and good, but she died, and the school was taken by a dreadfully cross, ill-tempered woman, who treated me so ill, that I ran away and came to you. Now you know all."

"What is the name of that lawyer? Send for him this moment—say a dying man *must* speak with him. You will not refuse me this last favor, will you, Freddie?" And he pressed her hand, and looked yearningly into her face.

"Not for the world would I neglect a wish of yours at this time," she said, tenderly; "I will send Tomkins—he will find him, if any one can."

"Yes—yes—send Tomkins; tell him to take a Hansom cab with a good horse, and bring him back with him. Is it far?"

"Only at Lyon's Inn—that's not far, I believe."

In half an hour the messenger returned, accompanied by Mr. Mason.

The manager dozed again in the interval, but on the entrance of the lawyer he woke up, and seemed so much refreshed that poor Freddie was deluded into the hope of his ultimate recovery.

"Father," she said, in a low voice, "Mr. Mason is here."

"Eh! What?" he demanded, hurriedly; "what's that you are saying about Mr. Mason?"

"The lawyer, you know, dear, whom you sent for."

"Ay, ay—to be sure. I recollect now. I was thinking of something else, I believe." Then, raising himself a little, he pointed to Freddie, and said: "Do you know this young lady, sir?"

"To the best of my belief I never saw her before," replied Mr. Mason, "unless it were possible—but no; it cannot be that she is poor Wilson's little girl."

"It is all right," murmured the manager, sinking back on his pillow; "I can leave her safely in your hands. She will tell you all about herself. I have no time. It's getting very dark. Take these papers. My will is among them. I have done the best I could for her. Freddie! don't go on the stage, nor keep in the circus when you have no old father to watch over you. Let her go to a good school, sir, and learn to be a teacher. She has been a blessing to me, and my blessing will be upon her. Break off altogether from this life, my child; it is not fit for you. It will be hard to part from the horses, I know; but Tomkins will take care of them. You will see to all that, sir?"

"I will faithfully carry out all the provisions of your will," replied the old lawyer.

A short silence ensued, broken only by the terrible rattle in the throat of the dying man, and by Freddie's suppressed sobs.

"Hark!" exclaimed the manager, eagerly holding out his arms; "the little ones are calling me! Good-bye, Freddie—my child—bless you—bless you!"

These were his last words; and Freddie was a second time left an orphan.

A change had passed over the countenance of the dead man, restoring, probably, some of the appearance of his younger days.

Mr. Mason gazed steadfastly upon him, while long past scenes glided through his brain.

"Strange!" he thought to himself, "very strange! I prosecuted that man for forgery more than thirty years ago! And now I am called upon to execute his will. A pleasant predicament for a lawyer, to be pledged to carry out the will of a felon—a man dead in law, and not able to make a will! I am not bound to know it, however, and probably no one else is aware of it. Dead men and lawyers tell no tales.

CHAPTER V.

GILBERT BRACEBRIDGE.

TEN years previous to the events recorded in the last chapter, a man who had landed from an Australian vessel at an early hour in the morning, was strolling through Covent Garden market, not with the design of buying from the tempting stores of fruit and vegetables there displayed, but simply to pass away the time. His dress was coarse and much worn, but his carriage was so erect, and his countenance so frank and independent, that the most casual observer could not have taken him for a mendicant. Except that he wore his beard, which at that period had not become general, he looked like a mechanic out of work, or possibly a sailor. It was difficult to guess at his age, he was so weather-beaten and sunburnt, but it could not have exceeded twenty-five years.

His figure was remarkable for its great height, the breadth of the shoulders, and the general appearance of strength. In fact, in every movement of his athletic form, as well as in the free glance of his calm grey eyes, *power* was the predominating attribute. So he lounged about, unquestioned, though not unobserved, occupied by no business, but, from

the glance that he cast on the church clock whenever he passed it, apparently waiting for something or some one.

An elderly woman passed him, carrying with great difficulty a large basket loaded with vegetables, while her capacious apron was also filled to overflowing with *punnets* of strawberries and paper bags full of various other fruits. At this moment a large cabbage fell from the basket, and rolled to the feet of the lounger.

"You had better let me carry your basket for you, ma'am," he said, as he replaced the truant vegetable. "I have nothing to do, and I'll take it with pleasure."

"Are you looking for a job, friend?" she demanded, with a peculiar accent, which at once told a practised ear that she was a native of one of the western counties; "I mostly fetch my errants myself, for it takes a mortal sight of money to pay them boys every time—but if you *be* in want of a job"—and she cast a pitying glance on his shabby clothes.

"Not so hard up as that, mother," he replied, with a good-humored laugh. "I'll carry your basket just for the pleasure of it. I'm waiting about till the banks open; I was wrecked, coming from Australia, and lost everything but a bank bill. That's why my clothes are so out of sorts. But do let me have a good look at your face. Your voice sounds as familiar to me as my own mother's."

"I'm sartain sure I never seed *you* before, howsever," replied the woman, clutching her basket

firmly, for she had heard of that fair-seeming "British seaman," who beguiled the too-confiding housemaid, Eliza Davis, and she feared to trust her property in the hands of the courteous stranger.

"Yet, if your name is not Mrs. Penruddock, I'll swear that mine is not Gilbert Bracebridge," he exclaimed, as he caught a full view of her face under the close bonnet that she wore.

"Goodness gracious me!" she cried, nearly letting fall the basket, and the contents of her apron, too, in her surprise; "*you* can't be little Gilbert Bracebridge, though, to be sure, he were a big boy of his age, too, when he runned away. Why, you be a man growed! There—get out with 'ee, do! You be a-making game of I!"

"No, indeed, I'm not. Why should I not be a grown man in nine years, though they've not altered *you* very much. What can I tell you about old Tytherleigh to make you remember me? There was the gay Countess, enjoying herself among her fashionable friends in London, while the poor old Earl was pottering about in his cabbage garden, and feeding his pigs."

"Ay, my lad," said the woman, shrewdly, "but many folks could tell of them things. Now, can you tell I who drownded my tom cat?"

"Why nobody drowned him!" exclaimed the man, bursting into a loud laugh. "Bill Parsons and Jim Allen tried to drown him, but I gave them both a good hiding, and brought poor Tom home, shiver-

ing in his wet coat. And you gave me a new sixpence for doing it."

"Sure enough, then, you *be* Gilbert Bracebridge," she said. "Bring the basket, and come along home with I."

Mrs. Penruddock lived in one of the streets that lead out of the Strand to the river; and, like most of the inhabitants of that region, she supported herself by letting lodgings.

She ensconced her visitor in an easy chair in her little back parlor, beside the fire—for, though the summer was far advanced, that small, cellar-like room was always so damp and dark, that a fire was acceptable at all seasons in the mornings—and went down stairs to superintend the preparation of breakfast for herself and numerous lodgers.

When she returned, she found him sitting with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands, in so deep a fit of abstraction that her entrance failed to disturb him. It was only after repeated summonses that he awoke from his reverie to a comprehension of the fact that an excellent breakfast was on the table.

"The sight of you, Mrs. Penruddock," he said, turning again towards the fire when the meal was over, "has brought back the thoughts of old times. I have been expecting, all breakfast-time, that you would tell me something of what has happened since I went away."

"Well—a good deal has happened, but I didn't like to begin talking about it till Sally had cleared

away the things, and was safe at her own breakfast. She's mortal curous, is Sally, and would listen at a key-hole sooner than say her prayers, I do believe."

"Has anything been heard of Ellen?" he asked, in a low tone, while his face sunk again upon his hands.

"Not a word. But *they* say, as ought to know, that My Lady always would have it that she's married."

"It is likely the Countess would maintain that, after she had consented to her own son's marriage with the poor deluded girl. It would be a hard blow to her pride to know that a girl would jilt Lord Tytherleigh for another man, unless she were going to marry that other."

"Don't 'ee say nowt about jilting—that be a hard word for it," said Mrs. Penruddock, deprecatingly.

"What else can you call it," he rejoined, almost angrily, "when all the preparations were made, the guests invited, and the wedding to take place on the morrow?"

"I be older than you, and I were older then, and I knows more about it nor you did. The poor young thing! She loved t'other one, but she thought he'd played her false, and deserted her, and so she was over-persuaded like, into consenting to marry his lordship. But that very night before she were to have married him, the old lover, he comed back, and told her how he'd been just at death's door, as one may say, and could neither write nor send to her; and she went off with 'un, in his carriage, with-

out so much as coming into the house for a bonnet."

"How came you to know all this?" asked her visitor, looking up eagerly.

"Why, you see, farmer Jolliff were a-courting of I, and I'd gone down the lane a bit, to meet 'un, and I stood back when the carriage came, and so I heered summat of what they said."

"Did you tell the Countess what you had heard?"

"I never told nobody nothing about it, till this blessed minute. For, thinks I, a still tongue breeds no strife; it couldn't do no manner of good to tell what I'd heered and seed, and, besides, I didn't want to let out that farmer Jolliff, or any other chap, was a-courting of I."

"Does the Countess ever speak of her?" he asked.

"Speak of her!" echoed Mrs. Penruddock, in tones of amazement. "Lord love 'ee! don't 'ee know she be dead?"

"No, indeed. You forget that I have been in Australia all these years, and have been out of the way of hearing English news. When did she die?"

"That's just what I've been waiting to tell 'ee about, all along," said Mrs. Penruddock, lowering her voice, and drawing her chair closer to his in a confidential, but rather mysterious way. "You must know that when Ellen went away, Lord Tytherleigh took it to heart dreadful. He shut up her rooms just as they was, and would never let any one go into 'em. The shutters is barred over the winders,

and there is her wedding dress lying on the sofy in the dressing-room to this blessed day, no doubt; and everything else as she left it. He went on moping for two or three months, and then came the election, and into that he went heart and soul. And so he was returned to Parliament, as was nat'ral he should be, and a mighty fine Parliament man they say he made. Then the old Earl died, poor old creetur, and they gave him a grand funeral, but nobody missed him. And he was hardly in his grave when the Countess was struck down, all of a suddenty. It seems she knew from the first how it would go with her, and all she said was that she must see her son before she died. So he was sent for back from London, and they was shut up together for an hour or more. Nobody could ever guess what it could be that she had said to him; but he was a changed man from that day. He dismissed almost all the servants, and sold all the horses but such as were used on the home farm, and one saddle horse for himself; and he gave up his place in Parliament, and kept no company, but just lived on like a poor man, eating the plainest food, and working on the home farm himself, just as if that was all he had to depend on; for he had sent away the steward along with the rest and did all his business hisself. There was the cellars filled with fine old wines, but never a drop did he drink, nothing but water. He'd go away sometimes to his other estates, for he managed everything, and never neglected any business; but he never seemed to care much for anything except sitting in the libra'y

and reading. Now, Gilbert, what do you think the Countess could ha' said to he?"

"Nay, if you could not guess when you were in the house when it occurred, how can I form any opinion on the subject at this distance of time? Did the Countess say nothing before her death that would throw any light on the mystery?"

"She never spoke again, after he called me and the nurse into the room, except just at the very last, when she opens her eyes, and she says, 'Tytherleigh,' she says, for it seems she'd forgotten he was the Earl then, and she says, 'Tytherleigh, wont you promise? Think of your sisters.' And he says, 'Mother,' says he, 'I promise.' And with that she just goes off like the snuff of a candle. Can you make head or tail out of that?"

"Yes, I think I can," he replied. "It seems plain enough to me that as the old Earl had been unable to make a will, and all the real property had consequently fallen to the only son, the daughters were not so well provided for as they might have been, and their mother was naturally anxious that he should make this up to them."

"No; it couldn't be that, no how," said Mrs. Penruddock, thoughtfully; "they all on 'em had a sight of money when they was married, and the Countess left all her property among 'em too. So it couldn't be that."

"Then it must have been some family secret," he said, laughing, "that neither you nor I have any right to know."

"That's what I've always suspected," she exclaimed, impatiently, "and that's just what I want to get to the bottom of."

"You'd better make up your mind that you never *will* get to the bottom of it," said he; "for when a man like Lord Tytherleigh—the Earl, I should say —makes up his mind to keep anything to himself, you may be sure he'll do it."

He rose as he spoke, and stretched his huge frame, that almost reached to the ceiling of the little room.

"Lawk-a-daisy me!" ejaculated Mrs. Penruddock; "only to see how you've growed! Why, name o' goodness! what age *be* you, mun?"

"I am only twenty-two," he answered, "but I've seen hard work and hard weather enough to make me look ten years older. The bank is open by this time, so I'll go and draw my money, and buy some decent clothes."

He made arrangements to take up his abode for a time with his old acquaintance, who had formerly been the cook at Tytherleigh Court, and set off on his errand.

CHAPTER VI.

LORD TYTHERLEIGH.

No one ever knew what it was that the Countess told her son upon her death-bed. The only words that met the ears of the eager listeners at the door were these, spoken in a loud voice by the young man: "Thank God, I was never married!" Therefore it seemed unlikely that disappointed affection was the cause of his abrupt retirement from society, and his abandonment of the brilliant political career on which he had entered.

Nevertheless he ceased not to prosecute a quiet, though unremitting search for the lost object of his early love; not with any thought of renewing an acquaintance with her, but under the idea that her hasty flight might have involved her in some position of difficulty from which he might, unknown and unsuspected, be the means of extricating her. He always resolutely thought of her as the wife of another; yet underlying this chivalrously maintained conviction, lurked a bitter doubt, fed by the mysterious nature of her flight, and the utter silence that had followed it, that the unknown lover whom she had preferred to him might have deceived her.

Goaded by this idea, which he would not, even to himself, acknowledge as having the slightest foundation, yet which he could not wholly stifle, he had once employed a detective to search through every class of the *demi-monde* in London and Paris for the original of a portrait which he entrusted to the officer, with the strictest injunctions to suffer no other eyes than his own to rest upon it. After the lapse of two months he was rejoiced to learn that no such person could be found.

It happened that, on the very day when Mrs. Penruddock related to Gilbert Bracebridge all that she knew concerning the elopement of the Earl's intended bride, that melancholy man was walking to and fro in his library, the only room, excepting his bedroom, which he retained in use of all the magnificent apartments in the fine old mansion.

His thoughts were, as usual, occupied by anxious speculations concerning the fate of the loved and lost one. He passed in review all the events of her childhood, from the time when his mother adopted her for her singular grace and beauty, to that night of agony when she had so mysteriously vanished. All was mere barren speculation. Nothing afforded the slightest clue by which to unravel the tangled web of mystery which surrounded her flight.

"Could she have drowned herself?" he asked himself; "yet no. The ponds had been drained in searching for her, and the river was not so deep nor so rapid as to have hidden her in its recesses, or have carried her away. Besides, what was the meaning

of that carriage which had passed through the village with only one occupant, a gentleman, and had shortly after returned, with the blinds closed, and going as fast as the horses could gallop? I have never yet ventured to enter her room; what if a careful search might discover something?"

He unlocked his desk, and took from it a key. But after a moment's hesitation, he replaced it hastily, saying: "I cannot, I cannot; her chamber shall not be desecrated," and threw himself into a chair.

But another train of thought passed through his brain. He started up, and muttering, "If *I* do not, some other will," he snatched up the key, and bounded up the wide oaken stairs.

The echoes of the old house were so seldom disturbed that they seemed frightened as he went, they answered so loudly to his footsteps.

He opened the door. All within was dark, except for one slender ray of light that found its way through a chink in the shutters, and fell upon some white object that glimmered ghostlike in its feeble beam. His heart beat as he stepped across the room gently, as though he feared to waken its slumbering tenant, and opening a window, admitted a flood of daylight into the chamber that had been shut up in darkness for so many years.

Every mute object around him told of the last occasion on which that room had been occupied. There stood a trunk, strapped and locked, ready for the journey—his wedding tour! Another stood

open, waiting for some final objects that were to find a place in it. Within the open doors of the wardrobe hung her travelling dress of delicate grey poplin; the toilet table was strewn with trinkets, gloves, combs, and a host of little knick-knacks. The tall wax candles, which had lighted up her young beauty the last time she had gazed into that dimmed and dusty mirror, still stood like sentinels guarding their posts. The vases were still filled with flowers, dried up and withered like his hopes. And, spread out upon the couch, was her bridal dress of costly lace, and the veil and wreath upon the cushion. But it was not to sentimentalize over these things that he had come, but to hunt up evidence by which to trace her.

He spent hours in the sorrowful search. Nothing to be found! Not a word! Not a name!

At last, with his hand upon the shutter, ready to resign all those relics of a bright young life to the darkness that had shrouded them so long, he cast his eyes once more round the apartment. There was a scrap of half-burned paper lying on the hearth. He shook off the accumulated dust and ashes, smoothed it out, and tried to decipher the nearly obliterated words. It was written in pencil, in a man's hand, on what looked like the back of a letter.

All that he could distinguish were these detached parts of sentences, which had been part of the right side of the short note—"been sick"—"of my"—"the regi-"—"to India"—"moment's interview."

Then came the signature—"-olph Trevanian." And underneath was written, "-urn this at once."

Re-locking the darkened chambers, he went back to the library, and sat for hours poring over this scrap of faded manuscript. Here, no doubt, was a clew, if he could only seize it. But it evaded him persistently. He knew no Trevanian as a friend of the family. What should he do?

Suddenly a new idea struck him. In ten minutes more he stood on the railway platform, waiting for the night train to London; and while it was yet morning he was in a private room in a hotel near Charing Cross, waiting the arrival of his friend the detective.

A quiet-looking, keen-eyed little man was soon after announced as Mr. Smith; and the Earl turned round with a look of annoyance.

"Oh! It's you," he said, while the frown passed away from his brow. "I thought the waiter said Smith."

"So he did," replied the little man. "What's the use of giving him my real name, and setting all the people in the house buzzing to find out what I am here for?"

"Very true," replied the Earl, smiling faintly as he reflected that he was there himself as Mr. Robinson, and was only known as such even to the sharp-witted officer. "Now to the affair on which I want to ask your opinion. A young lady disappeared some years ago, very mysteriously, and her friends have hitherto been quite unable to discover her."

"The same party as you were after on a former occasion, I presume, Mr. Robinson, sir," interposed the detective.

"The same," said the Earl. "The suite of rooms occupied by that young lady in her guardian's house has been locked up ever since her departure, until yesterday, when a search was made, and this scrap of paper was found. Can you make anything of it?"

A pair of eyes, keen as gimlets, were instantly fixed upon it, and the busy brain behind them went to work.

"I think I can," replied the *soi-disant* Mr. Smith, with great deliberation. "The last line, of course, reads, '*burn* this at once,' which she proceeded to do, but in her haste, did not stay to do it thoroughly. My theory, drawn from this paper, is that she eloped with a gent named Trevanian, who might have been in a regiment going to India. Now, we've only got to consult an army list for that year, and we shall see whether there was a Trevanian in any regiment that was sent to India. After that, I can follow him up, easily. Will you oblige me with the exact date, Mr. Robinson, sir?"

"The date?" repeated the Earl, looking slightly confused; "the date of her departure, do you mean?"

"If you please, sir."

"It was the seventh of May, 1845," he answered, with a sigh that was not lost upon the professional observer.

"Thank you, sir," said the detective, making a note of the date in his memorandum-book.

"Spare no expense," said the Earl, handing him a bank-note, "and lose no time."

"I will do my best, Mr. Robinson, sir," responded the detective, bowing low, as he received the liberal fee, "and this evening, at eight o'clock, I will do myself the honor of waiting upon you again."

So he bowed himself out, and the melancholy recluse was left to pass away the weary day as best he could. But if he was lonely in his library at Tytherleigh, or when wandering about the park, or attending to his self-imposed work on his farm, how much more lonely was he in the bustling crowds of London. Weary of meeting those everlasting streams of unknown faces, he turned into the comparative quiet of the Museum Sculpture Gallery, and strove to forget his sorrow in contemplating the majestic ruins of antique art.

The detective, meanwhile, was engaged in ferreting out the mystery he had undertaken to fathom, with all the eagerness and pertinacity of the terrier (to which he bore some resemblance) while in pursuit of a rat.

He had time also to attend to another little affair, not exactly belonging to his present pursuit, yet growing out of it. This was the examination of a file of the *Times* newspaper.

"Here you are," he muttered: "'Mysterious disappearance of a young lady on the eve of her marriage;' so, that's you, my Lord! I knew there was

something behind the Robinson. Well! your secret is safe with me. Though why he should want to keep dark with *me* is more than I can understand."

He was punctual to his appointment at eight o'clock, and the increased deference of his manner was all that marked his knowledge of his unassuming client being a peer of the realm.

"Well," said the Earl, as soon as the door was closed, "have you succeeded?"

"As far as we have gone, Mr. Robinson, sir, I may say I have," replied the officer, producing his note-book. "If you will have the goodness to cast your eye over these mems., you will see that Captain Randolph Trevanian, of the —th regiment, sailed for India on the 10th of May, 1845, accompanied by his wife."

"His wife!" repeated the Earl, thoughtfully. "It would be a great satisfaction to prove that."

"Nothing easier, sir; she left home on the seventh, and they sailed on the tenth. That leaves only two days on which they could be married, or three at the outside, as they might have been married on the tenth, before sailing. We'll call it *three* days, then. They must have been married by licence, and most likely in London."

"What a fool I have been not to think of that before!" exclaimed the Earl. "I'll inquire about that to-morrow."

"You will excuse *me*, Mr. Robinson, sir," interposed the detective in his blandest manner, "but as I have undertaken to carry this business through, I

should prefer *to* carry it through. I have my own ways of going to work."

"You will not advertise?" said the Earl, nervously.

"Nothing so vulgar as that, sir. I work out of sight, like a mole, Mr. Robinson, sir. Never show above ground till I've got something *to* show."

"Perhaps you are right—of course you are right. Manage the business in your own way, then."

"I am obliged to you, sir, for your confidence," said the detective; "may I now trouble you for the name of the young lady?"

"Her name!" repeated the Earl, turning red and pale by turns; "oh, yes! Her name was—was Ellen Bracebridge."

It was ten years since that name had last crossed his lips!

"Ellen Bracebridge," said the officer, entering it in his book with as matter-of-fact an air as though the agony of a human soul were not linked with its sound; "and her place of residence?"

"Is that necessary?"

"Why, you see, sir, if I don't find her in London, I shall have to look for her between the two points, that which she left, and that where she re-appeared, which was Southampton."

"I see—I see. It was Tytherleigh Court, in Devonshire."

Another matter-of-fact entry levelled that agony into the commonplace.

"I have one other item of intelligence respecting

this Captain Trevanian," continued the detective, consulting his note-book; "in '48 — that is three years after he went to India—he sold out. That will make it more difficult to trace him, and it will consequently involve more expense; but if you wish it, Mr. Robinson, sir, it shall be done."

"My object in instituting the present investigation is to discover her present residence," said the Earl; "the cost is of little importance."

"You speak like a gentleman, sir, and a man of business, and you may rely on my doing my utmost in your service. In case of my wishing to communicate with you, sir, shall I always find you here?"

"No, I think not. My stay is uncertain, and my residence for some time will be so, too. I will give you the address of a friend, who will forward a letter from you at any time."

He wrote on a slip of paper, "Mr. Mason, Solicitor, Lyon's Inn."

"A highly respectable party, indeed," said the detective, placing it carefully in his pocket-book; "and whatever information I may gain, Mr. Robinson, sir, I will give to him, under seal, for you, sir. I have the honor to wish you good evening, sir."

"Good evening," said the Earl; then throwing himself wearily back in his chair, he added, to himself, "the little man is wonderfully deferential;—is it the money, I wonder? Or, does he suspect what I am?—Suspect what I am!" he repeated, with a sardonic laugh. "No! No one suspects what *I am!*"

CHAPTER VII.

THE EARL'S DISCOVERY.

THE Earl returned to Tytherleigh, and for six weeks waited anxiously for the news which he began to fear would never come. One letter he had received from his agent a few days after leaving London, which set his troubled soul at rest to some extent. It contained a certificate of the marriage of Ellen Bracebridge and Randolph Trevanian at Southampton, on the 9th of May.

A month ago, or any time previous to the finding of that half-burnt paper, this would have been all that he could wish for; yet now, it seemed only to increase his longing to learn more about her. He wanted to gain some information concerning the Trevanian family; but he had shut himself so completely out of society that he knew not where to seek for such intelligence. Through Mr. Mason he ascertained that there was no Randolph among the higher branches of the family; but there were a few disreputable members (probably disreputable, because poor) only distantly connected, and hardly recognized by the more prosperous portion.

The idea of Ellen—his Ellen, as he sometimes

fondly called her—being destitute, perhaps wanting the necessaries of life, while he had the means and the will to help her, was maddening to his impatient spirit. Yet frequently, when fancy had taken her wildest flights in depicting her imaginary sufferings, he would check himself with the half uttered exclamation, "And yet, thank God! she did not marry *me!*"

His dreams and anxieties, however, did not divert his attention from worldly affairs. As if his only dependence for the means of aiding her rested on his own earnings, he devoted himself more and more assiduously to the cultivation of the home farm, even working on it himself.

At length came a telegram, sent by the detective through Mr. Mason. It only contained these words, "Found. Please come to London."

He obeyed the summons without delay, and was soon in close conference with his diligent emissary. It is needless to detail the whole of their conversation. The officer, who knew Paris as well as he did London, and following up some faint scent on which he had alighted, went to the former city, and succeeded in finding Captain Randolph Trevanian, a dissipated man who gained a precarious living at the gambling table. He found no difficulty in cultivating an acquaintance with such a man. He accompanied him to his favorite haunts, lent him money, and gradually wormed himself into his confidence, till he obtained from him the information that he had a wife, living in a small village near St.

Malo. "Mr. Smith" was soon after obliged, by urgent business, to return to England; but he took St. Malo on his way, and saw, at the village indicated by his friend, a lady whom he believed to be the original of the portrait which the Earl had placed in his hands some years before.

Having rewarded the detective's diligence beyond his utmost expectations, the Earl set off at once for France. It was evening when he reached the village, and he had only sufficient light to distinguish the house by the description which had been given to him, before night closed in, cloudy and moonless. He had no intention of presenting himself before the inmate of the cottage, who, if she were indeed his former playmate and once affianced wife, would certainly recognize him. All that he desired was to identify her beyond the possibility of error.

The cottage was surrounded on all sides by a garden, and through this he wandered, making himself acquainted with the various paths, and the spots where he could best shelter himself among the thick shrubs and evergreens, should he be discovered and pursued.

A light at length glimmered through one of the front windows, and he cautiously approached to reconnoitre.

A fragile looking woman sat by a table on which a lamp was burning. A small, much used workbox stood open before her, and her wearied-looking hands were employed in repairing a child's garment. The Earl made no noise; yet she seemed half con-

scious that strange eyes were watching her, for she looked round nervously, and shivered.

As she turned her face towards the window, he beheld the countenance of his lost love. Pale, indeed, and prematurely withered, and the features sharpened by suffering, but still the face that had been the light of his youth.

In that moment, the love that had burned in his breast with undiminished fervor during all the long years of their separation, passed away like the last cloud of incense from an altar, and a deep and holy pity took its place. He had come resolved to aid her because he still loved her; but now that resolve took a ten-fold firmer hold upon his soul, because it was founded upon a pure and divine compassion.

"Freda! Freda!" cried Mrs. Trevanian, in a weak and rather querulous voice. "Bring me a shawl, my child. I feel quite chilly."

"Yes, dear mamma!" answered a sweet, clear child's voice, and in a moment after, a girl of ten or eleven years old entered, carrying a shawl, which she wrapped tenderly round her mother's shoulders, ending with a loving embrace and a kiss.

"Poor darling!" said the mother, passing her hand caressingly over her daughter's clustering curls.

"Why do you say *poor* darling?" asked Freda, kneeling on the stool at her mother's feet. "I think I am a very rich darling, when I have such a mother as you are, to make me happy all day long."

"But I cannot do for you what I want to do, my

own," sighed Mrs. Trevanian. "You ought to go to a very good school, and to have many things besides, that I have not the means to pay for."

"I am very sorry you have so much trouble in mending my clothes, dear mamma," said the child, looking regretfully at the torn garment on her mother's knee; "but if it were not for that, I would not mind wearing them after they get old. I was not careless, indeed, when I tore that great hole."

"My pet, I know you were not," replied her mother, pressing her to her bosom. "You have grown out of all your clothes, my poor darling, and then they are so very, *very* old, too, that I know you cannot help tearing them."

The watcher at the window had heard enough, and stepped cautiously back. He had nearly reached the garden gate, walking close under the shadow of the bushes, when he heard the latch rattle, the gate swung back, and a man went hastily towards the house, almost touching him as he passed. Who could this be? An authoritative knock at the door seemed to intimate that the new comer had, or assumed to have, the right of admittance. Were there other occupants of that small cottage, besides Mrs. Trevanian and her child? Or was this Randolph Trevanian himself?

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, the door was opened. The shrinking figure of Freda, holding it wide as she retreated behind it, was visible for a moment by the light of the lamp in the parlor, and the stranger strode through, taking

no notice of the child, entered the parlor without ceremony, and shut the door, leaving poor little Freda in the darkened passage.

To leave the premises now seemed absolutely impossible. It was in vain that he represented to himself that he had no right to remain there, the self-constituted guardian of another man's wife and child while their legal protector was present. Nature was stronger than law; and the very manner in which he had pushed by that little terrified girl, and then shut her out in darkness, was enough to arouse every drop of chivalrous blood in the Earl's body. He returned to the window, and with even greater caution than before, peeped in through the tangled boughs of a clematis that half-covered the rustic casement.

The stranger was seated at the table, opposite to Mrs. Trevanian, who trembled and cowered under his fierce glance, like a bird under the gaze of a serpent. Even at that critical moment the Earl was struck by the wonderful personal beauty of the man. His tall, symmetrical figure, exquisitely cut features, clear dark complexion, brilliant eyes and teeth, and dark curly hair, all were perfect. But the soul that animated him was diabolical. He looked like a beautiful devil.

"I tell you that I *will* have them!" were the first words the Earl heard him utter, and he struck a fierce blow upon the table to emphasize his speech.

"Oh, Randolph!" pleaded the terrified woman, "remember they are my poor child's only dowry. What will become of her when I am gone? I know

I have not very long to live, and I have kept these few jewels so sacredly all these years to be a provision for her when I am dead."

"You are always talking some infernal nonsense," he replied, contemptuously. "What the devil ails you now?"

"My strength fails more and more. And I get so little for teaching, and have to work so hard and walk so far."

"Grumbling as usual," replied the handsome brute; "but that's all nonsense. Walking is good for you."

The listener ground his teeth.

"But not so much of it, and in all weather," said the patient wife.

"Then why don't you give up your teaching, if you don't like it?" asked Trevanian, with an air of supreme indifference.

"And starve?" she suggested, reproachfully.

"Just as you like for that," he replied, with a heartless laugh. "I leave you to manage your own affairs as you choose. But I did not come here to-night to discuss all these questions with you, but merely to fetch those jewels. They will be safer in my hands than in yours, for you would be robbed, and perhaps murdered, if you were known to have such valuables in the house."

"But nobody *will* know unless you tell them," she answered, with some little appearance of spirit; "and if they were to come and murder me, neither they nor you would ever be able to find them."

"I am not such an egregious ass as to set any one on to murder you, you little fool," he said, contemptuously, stroking her under the chin with one finger. "I should have to pay a larger annuity in the shape of hush money than the present state of my exchequer could well afford. Come now, Nell, be reasonable," he continued, taking her hand, and assuming an air of tenderness; "give me those jewels—you will never want to wear them while you remain here—it is not safe for you to keep them about you in this lonely place—and I pledge you my word of honor that Freda shall have the full value of them when she marries, or is old enough to want the money."

A very slight elevation of the eyebrows marked her scornful appreciation of his appeal to his *honor*. He saw it, and his dark eyes flashed with a vicious light, yet his low, well-modulated voice lost none of its insinuating sweetness.

"Come, now," he added, after a short pause, "will you think better of it, Nelly, and let me have those jewels?"

"No, Randolph, *never*," she answered, firmly. "I look upon them as a sacred trust for my child, and my conscience will not let me part with them:"

"Will you come with me to Paris or London, and sell them—for they are of no use to you, or Freda either, in their present form—and then lend me only a small part of the money?"

"I could not trust you, Randolph," she said, sadly. "I know, too well, that in either of those

places you could *lawfully* take from me anything I possess."

"And that is your final decision?"

"It is."

"Well, then, nothing more remains to be said," he remarked, with the tone of one who entirely acquiesces in the inevitable. "Will you excuse the light for one moment?"

He left the room, carrying the lamp in his hand. The Earl heard him call Freda, in a mild tone, and afterwards he distinguished the sound of his firm tread ascending the stairs.

"All danger of violence seems past," thought the unseen witness of the painful scene which had just been enacted, "and I have no longer an excuse for keeping this undignified post of eavesdropper; and yet there was a devilish glance in that fellow's eye as he went out! No—I cannot leave them yet."

In a few moments Trevanian returned with the lamp and a large key.

"Now, Mrs. Trevanian," he began, but stopped abruptly when he saw that his wife lay back in her chair, pale and rigid.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed, "if she's dead, that spoils all!"

On investigation, however, he found that she was not dead, but in a death-like fainting fit. With considerable skill and care he administered restoratives, though he swore rather savagely when he could find neither wine nor brandy in the "infernal hole."

Gradually she recovered without the aid of any

other stimulant than water, and sat up, shivering, in her chair.

"Are you sufficiently recovered to understand what I say to you?" he demanded, sternly.

She nodded assent.

"I must return to Paris by the next train, which leaves St. Malo in two hours; therefore I have no time to waste, otherwise I would allow you a longer space to recover yourself. Do you recognize this key?"

She stared at it with a bewildered look, and murmured something that the Earl could not distinguish.

"Yes, you are right," said Trevanian; "this is the key of the garret. Your Freda is locked up there."

He said this very emphatically, and paused.

"Why have you locked her there?" whispered the poor mother, sinking back.

"Command yourself, and do not faint," he said, in a hard, cruel tone. "If you do, it will be the worse for her. I *must* go back to Paris to-night, and if I cannot have the jewels, I will at least have revenge. Do you understand me?"

"I hear what you say, but cannot understand what you mean."

"I will soon make my meaning perfectly clear," he replied, with a fiendish smile. "Freda is locked in the garret, and this is the key. Give me the jewels, and I give you this. You can let her out, and no harm is done to her. Keep to your resolution and refuse to give up that box of gewgaws, and

I set fire to the pile of pine wood under the stairs, just wait till the stair-case is consumed, and then leave you to get your child out as you can."

"It is not in human nature to do such a deed!" cried the horrified woman.

"Possibly not," he replied, coolly, "but it is in *my* nature, as you will find if you persist in your obstinacy; and, furthermore, I will only give you one minute's time for deliberation."

He took from his pocket a box of matches, which he displayed ostentatiously, while he observed the hands of his watch.

Before he left London the Earl had provided himself with a small revolver, not knowing but that his present quest might lead him into some position of danger. He drew it forth with a feeling of deep thankfulness; for he was a slightly-built man, of only middle height, and by no means fitted to cope, unarmed, with the athletic savage with whom, he felt convinced, he should be compelled to combat. The poor distracted wife and mother might find it impossible to believe her husband capable of such atrocity; but *he* read in the villain's handsome face and gleaming eye a depth of malignity that would carry out his vindictive threats to the utmost.

When the minute had expired, Trevanian quietly returned his watch to his pocket, and quitted the room, without so much as looking at his wife, who sat motionless, staring at him with a vacant gaze. At the sound of striking the matches, she rushed to the door, exclaiming: "Oh! No! no! no! Stay,

Randolph! I will give them to you! I will, indeed! Come back! They are here!"

"Be quick, then," he said, returning hastily.

"Is the fire out?" she asked eagerly, trying at the same time to pass through the door.

"It is not kindled," he answered, pushing her back; "give me the jewels, and let me be gone."

She raised a corner of the carpet, removed a small portion of the floor, and took a box from the recess thus opened.

Trevanian snatched it from her, took one hasty glance at the contents, and darted from the room.

"The key! Give me the key!" she cried, following him. Then uttered a piercing shriek, and she seemed to cling to him, while she continued to scream out, "The house is on fire! My child! My child! Randolph, give me the key!"

Then came the sound of a blow—a heavy fall—and Randolph Trevanian rushed down the garden.

All had passed so rapidly that the Earl had only time to reach the door at the moment when the ruffian passed out. He followed quickly in pursuit, but the other had so much the advantage in height and swiftness that he had no chance of overtaking him.

"Stop!" he shouted; "Randolph Trevanian, stop, or I will shoot you!"

Trevanian turned, and the Earl was by his side in an instant.

"Give up your plunder, and the key!" he said, presenting his revolver at Trevanian's head.

The answer was a shot that singed his hair. To hesitate now would be madness, for more lives than his own depended on his immediate return to the cottage. The Earl's shot took effect as his adversary was starting forwards, and brought him to the ground on his face. He fell upon his own pistol, which exploded, probably completing the work of death.

Without bestowing a thought upon him, who, if dead, had brought his punishment upon himself, the Earl snatched up the key and box, which lay together as they had dropped from Trevanian's left hand, and ran back with all speed to the burning house.

Mrs. Trevanian lay senseless or dead where her brutal husband had flung her; but that was no time to attend to her, for the flames had made considerable progress, and Freda's situation was becoming critical.

"Freda!" he shouted, as he bounded up the stairs, though half suffocated by the smoke, "knock at the door to guide me; I'm coming to let you out. Knock loud!"

Freda had been terrified by her mother's screams, and afterwards by the smoke, but her dread of her father was too great to allow her to cry out for help. But this was the voice of a stranger that called to her in kindly accents, and the poor child made such a drumming on the door of her prison that her deliverer found it without difficulty.

Catching her up in his arms, and giving her hur-

ried directions to hide her face in his neck and breathe through his beard, the Earl commenced the descent of the narrow stairs. But the smoke was now so dense that he staggered and nearly fell when he reached the landing.

"Go into mamma's bed-room," whispered a voice in his ear; "it's just before you—we can get out of the window."

He stumbled into the room, half dead. Freda slipped from his arms, and drew him to the open window, where the fresh air partially restored his disordered senses.

"Where is mamma?" demanded the child, anxiously.

The question fully roused him.

"Safe, I trust, my child," he answered; "but I must go to her."

The descent from the window was easily accomplished by means of the trellis that supported the climbing plants which covered the cottage walls. Mrs. Trevanian was still insensible, and the Earl bore her from the burning building and laid her on the grass in the garden.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELLEN TREVANIAN'S DEATH.

THE alarm of fire had now spread through the village, and first on the scene of action arrived several of the good nuns from a neighboring convent of Sisters of Charity.

To them the Earl briefly stated that he had seen, in passing, that the house was on fire, and had been fortunate enough to rescue the lady and child. He pressed Freda's hand as he said this, as a hint to her not to be more communicative.

When Mrs. Trevanian began to show symptoms of returning life, two of the nuns carried her away to the convent, so that, on awakening to consciousness, she might not behold the destruction of her home. The Earl himself was so dizzy and sick that he was fain to lean on the arm of a stalwart sister, and seek the shelter of the same hospitable asylum. Freda held his other hand; but, ill as he felt, he did not forget, before leaving the garden, to ascertain that the box containing Winifred's jewels was safe in the pocket into which he had dropped it.

"Are you crying, Freda?" he asked, as a sob fell on his ear.

"I can't help it, sir," replied the child, as though she were pleading guilty to a fault.

"Don't cry, my brave little darling," he continued, in a soothing tone, "your mother is not much hurt, I hope, and will soon recover."

"I am not crying about that," said Freda, "because mamma often faints like that, and always gets quite well again. But, oh! what will poor mamma do, now all her things are burnt? We shall have no home now!"

She ended with a burst of piteous weeping.

"My child," said the Earl, in a tone that carried conviction with it, "you shall have a much better home. Your mamma shall never again go out teaching, nor ever again be obliged to mend your clothes. She shall have a carriage and plenty of money, and you shall have a pony."

"Oh, thank you! thank you, sir!" cried Freda, wiping her eyes, though I am sorry to say it was on the skirt of her frock. But a fresh gush came with another convulsive sob, as she said, mournfully, "And I'm afraid my poor little old doll is burnt, too!"

The Earl stooped, and folded the child in his arms.

"Freda," he said, kissing her, "you shall have the prettiest doll that can be bought in London."

"Oh, thank you, sir; how kind you are!" she said, returning his kiss with child-like frankness. Then, her ideas flying off at a tangent to another subject, she caressed his beard with her small hands,

and said, "How your beard smells of smoke! The dear beard that kept me from being smothered when you carried me down those dreadful stairs!"

The child's heart was completely overcome as she thought of all this. She sprang at him, clasped both arms round his neck, and kissed him, and sobbed out in broken sentences her praise and gratitude, till the nun was obliged to interfere, and take her from him before he was deprived of the little breath that remained in his body. "To-morrow," she said, "when Monsieur was quite recovered, Mademoiselle might kiss him as much as she pleased, but to-night she must have a little mercy."

Fresh water and rest soon restored the Earl, and he then requested an interview with the Superior of the community.

A graceful and gracious lady made her appearance. She was somewhat advanced in age, and her face beamed with sympathy and benevolence. She had lived in the convent for forty years, yet her manners had lost nothing of the easy, yet dignified grace which they had acquired in the polished and courtly society in which her early womanhood had been spent.

The Earl was a quick and accurate reader of character, and a very brief conversation convinced him that Mrs. Trevanian could have no protector so efficient as this lady, provided she were put in possession of the exact truth of the case. He therefore related to her the whole story from beginning to end, suppressing only the one circumstance of Ellen's

engagement to himself. But this the quick-witted Superior inferred when he confided to her his own name and rank, under a promise to keep it a profound secret from Mrs. Trevanian. He did not desire, he said, that she should feel herself under obligations to a family towards some members of which she might be conscious of having acted with a slight degree of ingratitude.

When he narrated Trevanian's horrible attempt to burn his own child, the gentle nature of the Superior was roused to positive fury. He should never take that child out of her hands, she exclaimed; not even if he came armed with all the powers of the law. She had friends in high places still, *Dieu merci!* and she would stand her ground against any exhibition of civic authority.

Then the Earl hinted that the man was probably dead; whereat she crossed herself, and murmured a prayer for his soul, and suffered her indignation to subside.

In the morning, he observed, this doubt would be set at rest, when they should hear whether a corpse or a wounded man had been discovered on the road, as he must have been seen by those who went to the fire. Until then they could hardly decide upon the steps which it would be desirable to take in order to protect Mrs. Trevanian and Freda from further injury.

The Earl returned to the little *auberge* where he had left his valise, and sat for some time in the public room, vainly hoping to hear some tidings of

Trevanian. But though there was plenty of gossip about the burning of Mrs. Trevanian's house, not one word was uttered concerning a dead or dying man having been found on the highway. He would have gone out himself to investigate the matter, but he feared to excite suspicion, and was, besides, still suffering so much from the effects of suffocation, that any exertion was painful. He came at last to the conclusion that the ruffian had been only slightly hurt, and had gone away.

It was not pleasant to reflect that Trevanian might be still wandering round, intent upon working out his fiendish designs upon that helpless woman and lovely child; yet, on the other hand, there was a great satisfaction in knowing that he had not, even in so just a cause, stained his hands with blood.

The Earl probably slept all the better for the belief that Trevanian was still alive, though he could not have felt any addition to his personal security, should so unscrupulous and vindictive a man recognize in him his antagonist of the previous night. Such thoughts, however, failed to disturb him. He slept calmly, and went early in the morning to inquire after Mrs. Trevanian and her child.

The accounts he received of her condition were anything but satisfactory. She had suffered serious injuries from the blow, and also from the fall, and the good sisters were in great distress about her, for they had known her well during the three years that she had lived in the neighborhood, and to know her was to love her. They were greatly exercised con-

cerning the way in which she could have received such hurts, and appealed to the Earl to account for them. Still anxious to hide her domestic wrongs from the public gaze, as well as to keep out of sight his own share in redressing them, he replied by a suggestion that, as Freda was up-stairs, her mother might have tried to go to her, but fainted and fallen down again. He had found her, he said, at the foot of the stairs. Immediately an imaginative sister proceeded to demonstrate exactly how she must have fallen, so that her chest struck full upon the end of the banisters, causing that dreadful bruise as large as a man's fist.

"I wish I had killed him!" thought the Earl, as he followed a nun to the parlor of the Superior. "The cowardly ruffian! I would shoot him now without compunction."

The kind brow of the Superior was troubled, though she received him graciously.

"I see by your face," she said, "that you know how much worse our poor friend is. Oh, to think that a man could strike a woman such a blow! And she his own wife, too. We fear that her breast bone is broken, but we dare not examine too closely, it causes so much agony. When you left last night, we supposed her to be suffering only from faintness and the effects of fright; but when the sisters undressed her, to put her to bed, they found that she was severely bruised and shaken. Some of us remained with her all night."

"I wish I had killed him!" groaned the Earl;

"but I fear he has escaped. I have heard nothing of him."

"I have heard a rumor this morning," she said, "of a man having been found dead two or three miles off."

"Where? Tell me where, and I will go and see if it be he!" cried the Earl, starting up.

"Nay, my friend, that would not be wise," said the lady, placing her soft white hand upon his arm; "our police are very suspicious, and our criminal laws are not like yours in England, where a man is held to be innocent until he is *proved* to be guilty. You would be arrested on suspicion, though the body were that of a man whom you had never before seen, and you would be detained in prison until you had proved satisfactorily who you are, and what business brought you into this neighborhood. And I assure you, it is often very difficult to convince our country prefects, especially if they have formed an idea of their own that is unfavorable to you. Remain quite still. We shall know all that there is to know in time, if we have patience. And make no inquiries that may draw attention on yourself. *I* can ask what I please, without suspicion, and I will find out all, and tell you."

"Thank you, dear lady, thank you," he replied; "your advice is wise and friendly. And poor little Freda, how is she?"

"She is always with her mother, since very early this morning. She is a most lovely child—so gentle, so tender, so thoughtful!"

"And to be the offspring of such a man!"

"It is often so in nature, my friend," said the Superior; "a child resembles one parent much, and the other not at all. And sometimes a child will not resemble either, and we can but wonder where all the good, or all the bad, ever did come from."

"Freda is like her mother," sighed the Earl; "yet, I think, with more depth of feeling and strength of character than poor Ellen ever had."

"Do you wish to see Mrs. Trevanian?" asked the Superior.

"It is better that *she* should not see *me*," he replied, "for the reasons I stated to you last evening. But, should her injuries prove fatal, it may comfort her last moments to know that her child will not be left without a friend who is able and willing to protect her. Therefore, dear lady, I will await the result, and see her, if at all, only when all hope is past. May I be permitted to ask after her at the gate, twice or thrice in the day?"

"You shall *always* come in and speak to me," she said, with a graceful air of authority that was almost coquettish; "or, if I am occupied, I will say so with candor. And you shall come, not two or three times to ask after news of your friend, but six,—but seven times, if you will."

He took his leave with the deferential courtesy which her dignified deportment commanded, and the Superior, leaning back in her chair, closed her eyes and dreamed.

"Yes, he loved her once," so ran her thoughts;

"but now he loves her no more. It is all compassion. But that child—but Freda—in three or four years she will be a woman. He is still a young man,—not much past thirty. Oh, quite young for a man! And he sees in her already *more depth of feeling and more strength of character than ever poor Ellen had!* Ah, my good friend! Our sweet Freda shall be a Countess yet."

Is, then, match-making so inherent in womankind that it can find an entrance even within the sacred shadow of the cloister? It would seem so.

The Earl paid regular visits to the convent during the day, but heard nothing to cheer his soul. The poor sufferer seemed to be sinking slowly yet surely towards the grave.

The Superior told him, late in the day, that the rumor she had mentioned in the morning had been confirmed, and that there was now no doubt that the body of a man had been found nearly six miles off; but it caused no sensation in the village, because the people were so pre-occupied with the burning of Mrs. Trevanian's house and her present precarious state, that they had not a thought to bestow on anything else.

Another day was drawing to a close, when the Earl rang at the convent gate to make his final inquiries for the night. Without answering him, the weeping portress ushered him into the presence of the Superior.

"Is she dead?" was his first question.

"Not yet. But I was about to send for you. Come!"

And that was his Ellen, the first love of his youth—so pale and wasted, with the awful shadow of Death hanging over her.

Her eyes brightened with a momentary lustre as they fell upon him.

"I thought you would come," she whispered; "I have been dreaming of you. Freda! My child—"

"I will take care of her, Ellen," he said, answering her look of wild entreaty; "let your mind be quite easy on her account; I have her jewels safe, too, and she shall have them when she is twenty-one."

A bright smile spread over her face when he began speaking, and when he ceased, the smile was still there, though the spirit had fled.

A sad scene ensued when poor Freda was at length convinced that her mother was no more. The Earl, after many attempts to lead her away, took her with tender force out of the room, and carried her into the quiet and shady garden. Sitting there, within hearing of a little waterfall, he rocked her gently, and suffered her to weep without interruption, till worn out nature claimed her dues, and the young eyelids closed upon the child's greatest, though, alas! not her first sorrow.

Wild and strange were the day-dreams that filled the brain of the lonely man as he sat there, pillowing the child's feverish cheek upon his breast. He saw himself in the far Western world, tilling the soil that was to yield him bread, and dwelling in the humble log cabin that his own hands had construc-

ted. And Freda was with him as his one companion; not, as the good Mother Superior had pictured her, as the wife of a peer of England,—but as his child, and she would call him father. But when other figures began to come upon the scene, he shook off the dream, and murmured half aloud, "No, no! It must not be. My little blossom is made to adorn society, and must not be buried in an anchorite's cell to gratify my selfish love. I could not bear to see her with no alternative but that of living a lonely unloved life, or of becoming the household drudge of some illiterate backwoodsman. She shall have every advantage that I can give her; and for her sake I will continue for a few years more to be a living lie. Young Clarence is but a boy, and I am a faithful steward."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE.

WORKMEN from London were busy one Saturday afternoon under the Earl's superintendence, in the little village church at Tytherleigh; and the next day the church going part of the population were amazed by the sight of a simple mural tablet, inscribed:

"To the memory of Ellen Bracebridge, widow of Captain Randolph Trevanian, late of the —th Indian Regiment." Then followed the names and dates which told of her birth and death.

The Earl himself was present, as was his custom, and all that the most curious observer could discover in his manner and appearance which might afford a theme for gossip or commentary, was the total absence of change. This was rather puzzling, especially to those who had been most eager in ascribing his retirement from the world wholly to blighted affection.

The solitary man was, in truth, happier than he had been since Ellen's elopement. Not only was he able to clear her name from every taint of slander, but the love that had tormented him so long, had passed away like the flame of a lamp that has no oil.

It had not been killed or crushed out of existence; it had simply ceased to be. He had erected that tablet that all might read and be convinced, and he had placed her marriage certificate in the clergyman's hands, that all who wished might see it. He did this in preference to talking about her, which would have been painful to his shy, proud nature; yet he was too much accustomed to be "the observed of all observers" in the village to manifest or even to feel any embarrassment, though he knew that every eye in the church was oscillating like a pendulum from the tablet to him, and from him back again to the tablet.

There was only one stranger present; a tall, broad-shouldered, bearded man, who had looked steadfastly at the Earl, without noticing the tablet, until the subdued commotion of the people round him, the eager eyes, the nudges, the half audible whispers, drew his attention to it. As he read the inscription, a pale hue suffused his face under the bronzing of the tropical sun. He bowed his head upon his arm as it rested on the top of the pew, and after a few minutes leaned back with a calm unruffled brow. No one remarked his movements, so absorbed were all in the new wonder; yet in that brief space the convulsion of a great grief, and the exultation of a great joy had passed simultaneously through that bowed head.

It is to be feared that no one, besides the Earl, profited much by either the service or the sermon.

As the stranger sauntered back to the inn where

he had slept the night before, he accosted a grave, respectable looking man, who overtook him, and requested an explanation of what he had witnessed in church. The man, premising that he was the parish clerk, and as such a more reliable authority than any other person in the village, proceeded, nothing loth, to relate all that he knew and much that he surmised of Mrs. Trevanian's history.

"And her only brother," he continued; "a fine lad of twelve or thirteen, took her disgrace so much to heart that he made away with himself."

"What, a boy of that age commit suicide!" said the stranger, incredulously.

"Indeed he did, sir," asseverated the clerk; "there can't be a doubt but what he drowned himself, though his body was never found, for there had been heavy rains and the river was much swollen. It stands to reason now, don't it? What else could have become of him?"

"Very true," acquiesced the accommodating stranger. "What *could* have become of him?"

"That's just what I say, sir," argued the clerk, as if some new light had been thrown on the question. "He *must* have drowned himself, for one thing is certain, he's never come back here no more."

"That is indeed conclusive evidence," said the stranger, suppressing a smile.

"I am glad to have been able to give you this information, sir, as you are a stranger," said the clerk; "but I must wish you a good morning now, as I have to call in at the rectory. The rector he told

me just now in a confidential sort of a way, that he had the poor lady's marriage certificate at his house, and that it was his lordship's wish that anybody should see it that liked. And he requested me to make it known among the congregation in an informal, promiscuous kind of way; but you see, sir, I'm going to get the first peep, for it would never do for a man holding the office in the parish that I do, to let any one else be beforehand with me in such a case. Now would it, sir? I put it to you as between man and man, *would* it?"

"It is quite superfluous to answer such a question," replied the stranger, with a ceremonious bow, which was intended to express his sense of the other's dignified position. "If you have no objection I should very much like to accompany you, and afterwards you will I hope do me the favor of taking a glass of ale with me at the Tytherleigh Arms, where I am staying for a day or two."

"By all means, come to the rectory with me, I shall be happy to present you," said the clerk, pompously; "but, as for your hospitable offer, my dear sir, a man in my position, you see, is obliged to be very circumspect. It behooves me to be as a shining light to the common people, and it would hardly look creditable for me to be seen to enter a house of public entertainment on the Lord's Day. Our worthy rector, too, is very strong upon the temperance question. But in the *evening*, if you are disengaged—"

"Oh, yes—yes," said the stranger, hardly able

to repress a laugh; "in the evening, by all means."

They went into the rectory, and the certificate was shown to them by the stately old housekeeper, who snubbed the clerk unmercifully, and would no doubt have treated his companion quite as disdainfully, had he given her the opportunity. But he made no comment as he read the document, and left the house without having uttered a word.

"Just the same sly old humbug as ever!" said the stranger to himself as he watched the clerk ambling away with his chin in the air. "Let him come to-night, by all means! I shall hear all the news of the village, and then I'll go, unknown as I came. There is no one now who would be much rejoiced to see me. The Earl might, perhaps; and yet it would give him more pain than pleasure. What a different lot would mine have been, had I suffered the Countess to carry out her kind intentions! A collegiate education, and one of the learned professions, or a commission in the army; instead of this rough-and-tumble existence! Yet this wild life has its fascination for me, too, and is perhaps better suited to me than one of greater refinement and luxury. If I had known the truth, I should have remained, *perhaps*. But when I was told that my sister had disgraced herself, why, then—boy as I was—I could not be mean enough to accept her adopted mother's bounty. Nor could I bear to associate, as I had been used to do, with that generous Earl, who treated me like the brother he was so fond of calling

me. I have looked my last upon his noble face, and shall see him no more in this world. Were I to make myself known to him, it would only open his old wounds afresh. There is a load upon his mind now. Can he still grieve about Ellen? Or is it that mysterious something that his dying mother told him? That I shall never know, so I need not puzzle my wits about it."

His half-muttered soliloquy being at an end, Gilbert Bracebridge threw off his melancholy thoughts, and strode into the Tytherleigh Arms.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

THE week after the tablet was placed in the church, the Earl set off on a journey, taking with him three large trunks, in addition to his own modest valise. The villagers, who wondered at every thing, had not done wondering at this, when one who had been up at the Hall returned with the news that the suite of rooms which had been locked up ever since Ellen Bracebridge ran away, were now left open like any other part of the house.

Everybody who could frame an excuse for paying a visit to the Hall went there as early as possible. Once there, they naturally begged to see the mysterious apartments. By favor of one or other of the few servants, they obtained their desire; looked,—saw nothing,—and came away satisfied.

The Earl, meanwhile, had gone to London, whence he despatched the trunks to the convent where Freda remained at school, with a letter to the Mother Superior, in which he requested her to exercise her own discretion as to the application of the contents to the use of his little ward. They had belonged, he said, to Mrs. Trevanian, and his mother would

have sent them to her long ago, had she known her address. In a postscript he added, after much deliberation and considerable hesitation how best to word it, that she would find some articles of costly lace, which, he begged to suggest, had better be converted into money, as the sight of them would only excite in Freda's mind curiosity regarding a painful subject that had best be forgotten.

"No—it would never do for *her* to wear it when she marries him," said the amiable Superior, as she scrutinized the wedding dress with the eye of a connoisseur; "and yet it is a pity to sell it. It is superb. Bah! He can afford to buy her another still more exquisite."

So the fate of the wedding dress was sealed, and Freda was for some years clothed from her mother's wedding outfit, which the Earl had sent to her, less from motives of economy than because he regarded all Ellen's belongings as sacred things which belonged of right to her daughter. The jewels alone he retained, and added to those in the little box.

When all this was accomplished, the Earl felt more at ease than he had done for many a long year; and he cultivated his farm with a light heart, inspirited by the thought that he was working for his little Freda.

The summer and autumn had passed away,—his crops were harvested, and the product lay before him in the shape of a little pile of gold and a roll of crisp bank notes. It was the nest-egg for the small

fortune which he intended to acquire for his ward. Strange, it will be said, that he should act thus, instead of giving her a dowry out of his own ample possessions. It was strange,—but such, nevertheless, was his determination.

The night without was dark and tempestuous. The wind howled round the many angles of the ancient house, and roared down the spacious chimney; and if a distant door chanced to be opened, it sent a shrill and ghost-like whistle through the key-hole. The rain beat against the windows, and the large trees groaned and shrieked as their branches were ground harshly against each other.

Yet, dismal as were the outside surroundings, the lonely lord of the domain had never felt more cheerful.

The wood-fire blazed on the wide hearth; and as he stretched his feet towards the comfortable warmth, he built many a pleasant castle in the air for the benefit of his adopted child, Freda.

The opening of the door dispelled his reverie, and the old gardener (the only man-servant he retained in the house, so rigidly had he curtailed his expenditure) entered to announce that a stranger, who would not give his name, wished to see him on particular business.

"A stranger on such a night as this!" exclaimed the Earl. "He must be be a lunatic. Show him in, Ralph."

"If you please, my Lord," said Ralph, "I don't like the looks of him at all. Wont you please to

put that out of sight?" And he pointed to the money on the table.

The Earl smiled as he swept it into a drawer, saying, "*Now* you can show him in, I suppose."

It was a bright, sweet, heart-whole smile, and old Ralph often spoke of it in after times, for it was the last he ever saw on his beloved master's face.

The visitor entered; and the Earl thought that Ralph had good grounds for mistrusting him. A more forbidding and repulsive-looking being he had never beheld. He was apparently a tall man, but a twist in his left shoulder gave him an awkward stoop. But it was his countenance that was the most revolting, if that could be called a countenance where scarcely a resemblance to humanity existed. Either from disease, or accident, or natural malformation, there was not a feature that would, singly, have been recognized as belonging to man. The left eye was covered by a black patch, which lay so flat that it seemed the eyeball must be wanting. Two orifices gaped where there should have been a nose. The mouth was drawn up on one side out of all shape, and showed the toothless gums within. Even a portion of the lower jaw appeared to be absent. The left side of his head was bald, and the skin on that part, as well as over the rest of his face, was scarred and puckered till it looked like shrivelled parchment. Only the right eye remained intact, though denuded of eyebrow and lash, and that gleamed with a sinister lustre.

It must not be supposed that the Earl made this

accurate analysis at first sight. A single glance showed him a mass of loathsome ugliness, but a delicate regard for the feelings of the unfortunate being before him, prevented his looking at him again, until the turn of the conversation compelled him to do so. He merely bowed, and by a motion of the hand invited him to be seated.

"My Lord," began the stranger, in a voice that was on a par with his appearance, though he strove hard to articulate distinctly; "I cannot hold a long conversation, so I shall come to the purpose of my visit as briefly as possible. I am a soldier, or have been, and have been nearly killed by a shell. You see how it has left me. I was a friend of that Captain Trevanian whom you murdered near St. Malo, in France. I was coming to him by appointment when I found him, shot through the lungs, on the road near his home. I assisted him to a place of safety, and watched over him till he died. He bequeathed to me, as I can prove in his own handwriting, attested by the Mayor of St. Malo, a certain casket of jewels, of which you robbed him after you had shot him down. You see I am a plain, blunt soldier, and go straight to the mark, without any humbug. I am come for those jewels, and you must give them up to me without any palavering."

"What is your name, sir?" demanded the Earl, calmly.

"I don't mean to tell that, at present. It will come out, of course, if you are tried for murder, as it seems likely you will be."

"I did *not* commit a murder. I fired in self-defence, because the man first fired at me:"

"Come, come, that wont do. You threatened to shoot him if he did not give up his property to you. That was highway robbery to begin with."

"The property was *not* his—it was his wife's, and he had stolen it from her, and set her house on fire into the bargain," said the Earl, warming in the discussion.

"When the wife died, it became his without question, and you commit a felony in withholding it from the party to whom he willed it."

"I do not understand all the intricacies of the law," said the Earl, "but I will give you the address of my solicitor, and you can communicate with him."

"I shall not take your solicitor's address," replied the man, insolently. "If you drive me to take legal proceedings, I shall appeal to the laws of France, and have you tried for the murder and robbery of my friend, Captain Trevanian. After you are convicted and executed, as you will be, for I was a witness of the whole affair, though I was not in time to prevent it—after you are guillotined, I say, it will be an easy matter to recover my property."

"They are Winifred's jewels," cried the Earl, passionately, "and you shall *not* have them!"

"Ha! ha!" gurgled the horrible spectre, with a sepulchral attempt at a laugh; "we are getting quite excited! Better talk coolly and rationally. It's a serious thing to be tried for murder in France. In America,

now, the case would be different. *There* a man may shoot down his friend in open daylight, and if he has plenty of money, he may get off with, may be, a short imprisonment. But, in France, you are not so safe, and then the evidence in your case is strong against you. However, I'll not be too hard upon you at first. I'll appeal to little Winifred, and tell her all about it. She was not very fond of her father, I'm afraid; but we know that the faults of the dead are always forgotten; and I don't think she will grow very fond of the man who murdered him. However, I can't help that; and when she knows the rights of the matter, no doubt she will give up the jewels to their rightful owner."

"She cannot, for they are not in her possession."

"You own, then, that you have them?" said the stranger, casting his one eye sharply round the room, as if in search of an iron safe, or some such receptacle.

"I did not say that," was the prompt reply. "I merely stated that they are not in *her* keeping."

"It does not much matter who has them," observed the one-eyed man, carelessly. "The law will bring them to light, if you compel me to resort to it. But, on my honor as a gentleman and a soldier, I have no wish to drive you to extremities, if you will only be reasonable. If you wish to retain the jewels for Winifred, you can do so by paying me their value in money. I should but convert them into money if I had them. What do you reckon they are worth?"

"I am not a jeweller, sir, nor a pawnbroker," replied the Earl, proudly.

"Don't be offended, my Lord," said the one-eyed man, with a covert sneer; "but, without going into that question, as you don't seem to like it, what proposal will you make?"

"I have nothing to propose," was the curt reply. "I only know this, that Winifred's jewels, which her mother died to save (as you know right well, if you know anything about the affair,)—those jewels, I say, you *shall not have!*"

"And *I* say that I don't want them, if you will enter into a compromise."

"What sort of compromise do you want?" demanded the Earl, fiercely.

"Nay, now, don't get angry, my Lord. It's not what I want, but what I propose for your own good. I wont even ask you to give me the money all at once. Pay me a thousand pounds to-night, and I'll wait for the remainder."

"I have not got it," was the moody answer.

"Begging your Lordship's pardon, I presume you have a cheque book."

"I will not buy you off. The law may take its course."

"And when it *has* taken its course—when your Lordship is executed (though I don't want your blood, and shall try hard to have the sentence commuted to the galleys for life—even that will be hard enough on a man brought up like your Lordship, and it will be almost worse than death to be branded with the

T. F. P.* on your shoulder),—when you are disposed of by the law in one way or the other, what will become of Winifred? Who will take care of her?"

The Earl winced at this implied threat. He wanted time to reflect; he wanted to be rid of this hideous being, whose presence pressed upon his soul like a nightmare; yes, he would offer a compromise, if only to gain time, and so be able to look the danger fairly in the face.

"I will not give you a cheque," he said; "but I will give you five hundred pounds in cash. Will that suit you?"

"Can you not make it more?" asked the man, with an appearance of dissatisfaction, though his heart leaped with joy at the proposal.

"I have told you all that I can or will do. It is by a mere chance that I have even so much in the house."

"I must be contented to take it then, I suppose, and the sooner the better, so that I may catch the night train."

So anxious was the Earl to be rid of his hateful visitor, that he did not need this prompting to open the drawer into which he had a short time before laughingly swept the nest-egg of Freda's little fortune. It amounted to nearly the sum required. He made up the difference from his purse, and pushed it across the table to the one-eyed man, whose eager

---

* *Travaux Forcés à Perpétuité.*

hands closed upon it like the talons of a bird of prey clutching its victim. The Earl then observed, for the first time, that three of the fingers of his right hand were gone, and that only the fore-finger and a portion of the thumb did duty for the rest. The maimed hand was active enough in taking up the money, as its owner counted it rapidly, and deposited it in his breast pocket.

Then, rising and bowing to the Earl, he said: "My name, my Lord, is Grainger—Captain Grainger. You see I have modified my demand very considerably, in order to accommodate you, and have taken only half of what I had a right to expect. But when I find myself again in need of a little ready money, I will address a line to you to that effect, and I have little doubt that your good sense will point out to you the expediency of attending at once to my moderate requirements, without obliging me either to trouble your Lordship with another visit, or to have recourse to the arm of French criminal law to enforce my claims. I have the honor to wish your Lordship a very good evening."

Saying this with an undisguised sneer, he bowed low, with mock ceremony, and withdrew.

The Earl paid no attention to his salutation, but sat gazing moodily into the decaying embers of the fire, which, before the coming of that ill-omened beast of prey, had blazed for him so cheerfully.

Old Ralph brought in more logs to replenish it, and while busily arranging them, he said:

"I sat in the hall, my Lord, till that—a—gentleman came out; seeing he was a stranger, and—"

"And you, not liking the looks of him, Ralph, (which showed your good sense,) determined to see him safe out of the house. I'm glad you did. It would not be pleasant to see such a face as that staring between one's bed-curtains, would it, Ralph?"

"Oh, dear! my Lord, you make my flesh creep only to think of it!" said Ralph, shuddering.

"Then go to bed, old friend, and don't think of it. The man has been a soldier, he tells me, and was nearly killed by the explosion of a shell. It would have been well had he been killed outright," he added, with a deep sigh. "Good night, Ralph."

"Good night, my Lord," said the old man, longing to do or say something to solace his master, but not knowing how.

Left to himself, the Earl took down *Les Misérables*, and was soon, in imagination, as hopelessly entangled in the meshes of French criminal law as the hero of Victor Hugo's wondrously pathetic romance.

CHAPTER XI.

FREDDIE AGAIN AT SCHOOL.

I HOPE my readers are sufficiently interested in Freddie's fate to make them desire to hear more about her.

She has been for two years in the school where Mr. Mason placed her after Mr. Powell's death, the first year as a pupil, and the latter as an assistant teacher, though still taking lessons in music, French, Italian, and German. In outward appearance, she is a highly-polished and decorous young lady; but in her heart she often longs for the excitement, the fun and frolic, the daring feats and tumultuous applause of the arena. For, poor girl, her wonderful strength, though but little exercised at odd moments when alone and unseen, has increased instead of diminishing, and her abounding energy would be a torment to her, but that she had discovered that she possessed a great fondness for gardening, and had obtained permission to rise as early as she liked and *amuse* herself for an hour or so among the flowers. From flowers she quickly got to fruit and vegetables, which afforded more scope for muscular exertion. Then the gardener going away, much to her satisfac-

tion, she contrived to defer the engagement of a successor until she convinced Mrs. Templeman that she could do all the work herself, and that the exercise was very beneficial, nay, absolutely necessary, to her health.

Mrs. Templeman was a widow, with an only son, who was seldom seen in his mother's house. She was a highly educated and noble-hearted woman, in every respect fitted for the important work she had undertaken; but her energies were crippled, and her spirit bowed down by the greatest sorrow that a mother's heart can know,—the utter worthlessness and profligacy of her son.

Freddie had, from the first, attached herself strongly to Mrs. Templeman, and with the keen insight which affection gives, she had discovered that she was unhappy; but the cause of this unhappiness was only revealed to her when she had been a whole year in the school.

It was during the Christmas vacation, and Ernest Templeman was on a visit to his mother. Freddie had never been accustomed to the society of young men, and therefore had no means of contrasting his conduct with that of others; but she had read many novels, and Ernest Templeman fell so far short of her ideal standard,—based chiefly on the model of Scott's heroes,—that she at first disliked, and afterwards utterly despised and detested him. He professed to admire her exceedingly. Perhaps he did; but his mode of expressing it was by a mixture of coarse adulation and insolent familiarity which ex-

cited her unmitigated disgust. It was a great satisfaction to reflect that, having learned the "noble art of self defence" while with the circus, she had it in her power to knock him down, should he carry his audacity too far; and sometimes it was out of consideration for his mother's feelings alone that she refrained from chastising him. But she determined to bear with much before she would add a feather's weight more of sorrow to the burthen of that suffering mother's soul; so she treated him with the most chilling reserve when compelled to be in his company, and at all times systematically avoided him.

It was not alone his behavior towards herself that excited her disgust. He treated his mother with the grossest disrespect, and never manifested even the remotest show of affection for her, unless with the object of obtaining money.

His stay was, fortunately, not a long one; though it had already been too long for one poor creature's good.

During the following summer, a pretty, though vain and empty-headed servant girl, was dismissed in disgrace, and Freddie gathered, from half sentences dropped here and there, and from poor Mrs. Templeman's agony, that Ernest Templeman—the man who had dared to profess admiration for *her*—was the author of this wretched simpleton's ruin. The girl disappeared. She dared not return to her father's house; and it came out that she had gone to London, probably to seek aid and protection from him whom she supposed to be her lover.

Freddie's delicate and unobtrusive tenderness during this trying period won greatly upon Mrs. Templeman's affections, and she loved her better than any one except her own worthless son, while she trusted her infinitely more.

The Christmas holidays had again come round. The pupils had returned to their homes, and Freddie, having refused invitations from two of her favorite schoolmates, that she might help Mrs. Templeman with the house cleaning and other work preparatory to their return, remained at Ashford House.

"I cannot tell you how thankful I am that you are here, my dear Winifred," said Mrs. Templeman, as they sat at breakfast a few mornings after the house was cleared of its lively young inmates. The postman had just delivered the mail, and she held an open letter in her hand. "I must go to London immediately. Mr. Mason writes that he wishes to place a young lady under my care, and that it will be necessary for me to fetch her from town myself, and without any unnecessary delay."

"What *now?*" exclaimed Freddie in amazement; "just at the commencement of the holidays! How exceedingly singular!"

"There are peculiar circumstances, he says, which he will explain to me, but which he cannot very well state in a letter," said the elder lady; "so, of course, I must go; and there is other business that I can settle at the same time. Besides," she added, with a sigh, "I can see what my naughty boy is about. He has not written to me for several months."

As Freddie could find nothing pleasant or comforting to say on this subject, she continued eating her breakfast in silence.

"It is such a satisfaction to me to leave the house in your charge," continued Mrs. Templeman, "that I really must express my gratitude to you, my dear, for staying with me, instead of going on a visit to your friends."

"Gratitude to *me!* Oh, Mrs. Templeman!" cried Freddie, blushing deeply, "don't talk of gratitude to *me.* What do I not owe to your kindness?"

"I have endeavored to do my duty by you, Winifred, that is all."

"Then give me credit for trying to do my duty, too," said the girl, as, kneeling by Mrs. Templeman's side, she put her arms round her waist, and leaned her head lovingly on her shoulder. It was not often that the widow bestowed a caress or mark of endearment upon any of her scholars; not from want of affection, but because all her power of loving was squandered and thrown away upon an unworthy object, who received it with so much contempt that, quite unconsciously to herself, she felt that the poor fragments of what he spurned were not worth offering to any one else.

Freddie's action re-assured her. Half timidly she passed her thin hand over the clustering brown curls, and her mild eyes were suffused with moisture.

"So let it be, then, my love," she said; "and after all, duty is the highest motive that can govern our actions. Now, before I go, I will consult you about a plan

that I have been turning over in my mind for some weeks; in fact, ever since Miss Hetley told me she could not come back after Christmas. You are so far advanced that there is no necessity for you to continue any studies but music and the languages. What say you to taking Miss Hetley's place as junior teacher, and receiving instruction in those higher branches in lieu of remuneration?"

"Oh, I shall be delighted!" exclaimed Freddie, tightening her arms rather forcibly to express her pleasure.

"Oh, my child! Don't squeeze me to death! Why, Winifred, how strong you are!" cried Mrs. Templeman, in amazement.

"I suppose it must be the gardening," said Freddie, very much abashed; "but indeed I cannot help it."

"You are a dear, impulsive creature," said Mrs. Templeman, kissing her on the forehead, "and if all that strength is a sign of health, I am very glad you possess it. Only you must have a little mercy on such poor weak mortals as myself. I do not wish you to decide too hastily on what I have proposed, Winifred. Take a little time to consider the question, and tell me before I go, so that I may engage some one else, in case you change your mind about it."

"There's no fear of that, dear Mrs. Templeman," rejoined Freddie, with a merry laugh; "it is too good an offer to be declined. When shall you go?"

"I cannot arrange to go before the afternoon train, so I shall not reach London till late in the evening."

Freddie assisted in her preparations, and took heed of all her directions as to what was to be done during her few days' absence. She was in the midst of packing Mrs. Templeman's carpet-bag, when she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, Mrs. Templeman! What have you done with all that money that you had a few days ago?"

"It is safe in my desk, my love."

"Oh, no; it is not at all safe there!" replied Freddie. "Surely you wont go away and leave me with such a sum in the house! I am sure it is not safe. Let me take it to Chester this afternoon, and put it in the bank."

"It is too late, love. The train to Chester is just gone."

"But I can walk; it is only three miles."

"Why, you silly child! There would be much more danger in carrying it on foot than in keeping it in the house."

"Not in broad daylight. No one should take it from *me!* Remember how strong I am," said Freddie, with a little boastful laugh. "Pray, dear Mrs. Templeman, let me take it. I shall be *miserable* if you leave it here."

"And *I* shall be miserable to think you may have been robbed and murdered on your way."

"Then put off your journey till to-morrow, dear madam. A few hours cannot make much difference.

You will see Mr. Mason in the afternoon, instead of the morning, that's all."

"I shall want most of that money to pay my bills, as soon as I return," said Mrs. Templeman, dubiously; "it is hardly worth while to put it in the bank for so short a time."

"Can you not pay them just as well with cheques?" said Freddie; and a look of such real disquietude settled on her young brow that Mrs. Templeman gave in, and immediately after an early dinner Freddie started off in high spirits, with the greater part of the last half year's school money concealed in her bosom, and her own light purse in her pocket, to delude a possible highway robber.

A brisk walk brought her to the fine old city of Chester in less than an hour. Her business was soon transacted, and, disregarding Mrs. Templeman's advice to wait another half hour and return by rail, she set off to walk home again.

This exhilarating walk in a high wind was too great a pleasure for her to forego for the sake of being shut up in a stuffy railway carriage.

The latter half of her way homeward lay over a wild, furze-covered common, ending in a narrow lane about half a mile in length.

As she entered on the common she did not observe that a tall man, who was standing behind a gorse bush, about to fire at a covey of partridges, looked hard at her, and then, granting a respite to the game, threw his gun over his shoulder, turned into the path, and followed her at a short distance.

The noise of the wind drowned the sound of his footsteps, and Freddie walked on, pleasantly occupied with her own thoughts, and totally unconscious of the colossal specimen of humanity who was marching behind her, and who had to step out pretty briskly, too, in order to keep up with her.

As she reflected with thankfulness that Mrs. Templeman's hard-earned money was now safe from the rapacious attempts of her unprincipled son (for by one of those mysterious intuitions which sometimes warn us of impending evil, she felt sure that he would attempt to rob his mother's house as soon as he knew she was in town), she little suspected that a pair of eyes were admiringly watching her firm, elastic steps, and the easy poise of her tall, symmetrical figure.

Ere the common was quite crossed, some sharp points of sleet, mingled with rain, began to fall; but Freddie was not to be terrified into a run by such a trifle. She was just reckoning what she would do with her new accession of wealth, for, of course, if she worked for her lessons, she would have her little income to spend as she liked—Mrs. Templeman had assured her of that. She would make presents to several of the girls who had been kind to her—she would buy several books that she had long wanted—she would head a subscription to buy a gold watch for the drawing-mistress, whom the girls suspected of being very poor. In fact, if she did all that she wished to do, every pound she received would have to be spent twice over. It is an error not always

confined to the very youthful, that of spending ten pounds out of five. And Freddie was enjoying the full excitement of this agreeable process, and did not care for rain or sleet.

Near the entrance to the lane before mentioned, a high bank of earth, slightly hollowed out, afforded a partial shelter. A rustic seat was placed in the recess, and the branches of a spreading oak, that grew on the top of the bank, extended over it. In the summer, when these branches were clothed with foliage, it offered a very agreeable refuge from a shower; but Freddie was shocked to see that the seat was occupied, on this cold winter's day, by a miserable, thinly-clad woman, whom she remembered to have passed on the other side of the common, on her way into Chester.

It was not in Freddie's nature to "pass by on the other side," and leave such an object to her fate.

"Why do you sit here?" she asked, kindly. "You will be frozen to death."

"It don't much matter if I am," replied the woman, in a hollow voice, that was broken by a cough. "I'd be glad of it, if only my baby was safe."

"Can't you walk?" asked Freddie. "Are you tired, or sick?"

"Both, miss. I'm near dying of consumption, and I've walked till I can walk no farther."

Freddie unfastened her warm cloak and wrapped it round the shivering woman.

"Come, now," she said, in a cheering tone, "try once more. Give me your baby, and lean on my

arm. It is not very far to the village. Take courage, and you will soon be there, and have warmth, and food, and rest, and then you'll not talk any more about dying."

"Don't put your cloak round me," screamed the woman, trying to push it off. Then, raising her pale and haggard face, she exclaimed: "Oh, Miss Winifred! Don't you know me?"

"Is it possible?" said Freddie, scrutinizing her features with eyes full of pity and astonishment. "Can you be Kitty Reeves?"

"That I am, miss; so please take your cloak off me. You don't want to put it on such as me."

"What nonsense are you talking?" demanded Freddie, sharply. "You're a woman, aren't you? And a mother, aren't you?"

"That I am, more shame for me!"

"And you're sick, and cold, and perhaps starving; and what am I then? A brute, do you think, that I'd leave you here? Kitty, I always thought you a foolish, vain girl; but I should be something a great deal worse if I could leave you here to die, because a villain, a *scoundrel*, took advantage of your folly. So wrap the cloak about you, and come along."

"But, Miss Winifred, you don't know how wicked I have been, or you would not speak to me. He cast me off, and would not help me, and I was forced to—"

"Now, *stop!*" interrupted Freddie, in a peremptory tone. "You are a suffering woman, and that's all I care to know about you. Whatever wrong

you may have done rests between your conscience and your God. I would rather not hear anything about it."

She took the baby from its mother's arms, wrapped it snugly in the folds of her dress, and then helped Kitty to rise to her feet; but finding that she was really unable to walk, Freddie passed her strong right arm round the poor creature's waist, and half led, half carried her towards home.

"You'll tire yourself to death, Miss Winifred," said Kitty, "and you'll catch cold without your cloak. Only see how the rain is coming down! Better leave me here to die. If you'll only take my poor baby to mother, I don't think she'll have the heart to turn it away."

"I'm going to take you along, Kitty, so you need talk no more about it. And don't be uneasy about me, either. Have you not heard that God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb?"

CHAPTER XII.

OUT IN A STORM.

FREDDIE had not gone many paces with her double burthen, for she almost carried the poor young woman who was half paralysed with the cold, when her progress was arrested by a muscular brown hand and a deep-toned voice that said, with quiet authority, "I'll carry her."

She looked up and saw a remarkably tall, broad-shouldered man, of about thirty years of age. His complexion was bronzed by the sun and weather, and his long beard, tossed by the wind, gave him a wild and somewhat ferocious aspect. But his brown eyes were calm and kind, and his voice had that genuine ring that inspires immediate confidence.

Freddie took this in at a single glance, and drew these favorable deductions afterwards. At the first moment, her impulse was to drop her burthen and run away from him as fast as her feet could carry her. She checked this feeling, however, and suffered him to take Kitty from her.

"Will you hold this a moment?" he said, giving her his gun, "or are you afraid?"

Without deigning to reply, she took it, and placing

it on her arm like a sportsman, muzzle downwards, she walked onwards.

As he overtook her, she observed, with a feeling of admiration, that he carried Kitty with as much ease as she did the baby.

"Give me the gun," he said, "I can hold it easily here," and letting his burthen rest on his arm, he expanded his hand to receive it. "It is too heavy for you."

"I do not find it heavy," was her brief reply.

"You seem used to carrying a gun," he remarked.

"I have been used to do many things," was her curt response.

Now Freddie wished him to talk to her; she liked him for his kindness to poor Kitty; she admired his magnificent figure and handsome sun-burnt face; yet, for her life, she could not bring herself to speak civilly to him, nor try to appear other than sulky and unamiable.

The stranger, in whom my readers have probably recognized Gilbert Bracebridge, remained silent for some time; and Freddie felt so angry with herself for her rudeness that the tears forced themselves into her eyes. She had offended him, and he would not speak to her again. Of course he would not, only to be snubbed by such a young upstart as she was! What *could* have possessed her? Such was the tenor of her reflections.

"This storm is pretty severe," he said, almost shouting to make himself heard, but otherwise speaking in quite a friendly tone; "but we have much more severe ones sometimes in America."

"Are you an American?" asked Freddie, eagerly.

"No," he replied; "but I have lived several years in the western world."

The chief wish of Freddie's heart had long been to obtain some reliable information about America, and here was an opportunity, if she could only take advantage of it. But what would he think of her if she began talking prettily to serve her own purpose, when she had not had a civil word for him before?

He helped her out of the difficulty in the most natural manner possible.

"Have you any friends out there?" he asked.

"No," she answered, rather sadly, "I have no friends anywhere. No relations, I mean."

"Have you ever thought of going to America?"

He seemed determined not to let the conversation drop, now that it was fairly started.

"I have wished to learn something about it, different from what one gets out of books and newspapers," she replied; "would you be so kind as to let me ask you a few questions?"

"The more the better," said he, so heartily that she could not doubt his sincerity, "and I will answer them to the best of my ability."

"Is it a good place for a woman to go to?"

"That is rather a comprehensive inquiry," he replied, with a smile, "and I fear my answer must be somewhat vague in consequence. Women hold a better position in America than in any other country that I know of. They have not all that

they want, it is true; but they are working hard for their rights, and will get them. Their very discontent with the present state of things is a proof that their position is in advance of that of the more tranquil women of other lands, since cheerful submission is the worst symptom of slavery. Therefore I say that America *is* a good place for a woman to be in. And now if you will tell me what the woman you speak of is capable of doing, I may be able to answer you more satisfactorily."

"She can do a good many things."

"So can most women. But the question is, what sort of things?"

"She can teach. She is now teaching in a first-class school."

"Good. There is abundant employment for teachers, but the American standard of excellence is high."

"And she is a pretty good gardener."

"Excellent, too," said Gilbert, hardly able to repress a smile; "that is, if she goes out West. Is she married?"

"Married!" repeated Freddie, in amazement. "Oh, no, of course she's not married."

This time he was obliged to cough to hide his merriment.

"Has she plenty of energy?" he asked.

"I think so," she answered, dubiously. "I know she is not easily tired."

"And has she good health? Is she young?"

"Yes, she is young, and has excellent health."

"Young lady," said Gilbert, gravely, "I know you have been speaking of yourself. You told me that you have no relatives. Would it be wise or prudent of you to go alone to a strange land, among strange people?"

"And if I am alone in the world," said Freddie, proudly, "I am not a vegetable, to take root and stay in one place till I die! I think I shall go to America. I am almost sure I shall."

"If you do go, and are inclined to devote a few years to a good and noble work, you cannot do better than teach a freedman's school in one of the Southern States. The accursed system of slavery did not fetter the body alone, but extended to the mind. The slaves were kept in brutal ignorance that they might not know their rights or wrongs; and their emancipation cannot be completed till they have received the blessing of education."

"Then do you believe that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is true?" asked the girl, with more earnestness than logic.

"Ay, every word of it!" he answered, with fervor. "I served in the Union army during the war, and I taught a colored school afterwards; and I heard and saw enough to convince me that none of the horrors of that book are overdrawn. And now," he added, suddenly changing his tone, "don't you want to know why I left a country of which I think so highly? I'll tell you. I, too, am all alone in the world. When quite a boy, I went to Australia. I there got together a little money, and started for

home, intending to place a monument over the grave of my parents. I was wrecked, and lost all but a small sum. I then went to America. Soldiering is not a profitable business, and school-teaching little better; so it was several years before I was rich enough to carry out my project. However, it is done now. I have fulfilled what I consider a sacred duty, as well as the dearest wish of my heart, and now I am on my way back to the western world, ready to begin life anew. Here is a house; had we not better take her in? She is either asleep or insensible, I think."

"This is the place where I intended to bring her, if she has nowhere else to go to. Kitty! Kitty! Would you like to go to Widow Allison's?"

But Kitty was unable to reply, and Freddie led the way into the cottage.

"Dearie me, miss, what a day for you to be out in, and no umbrella, and no shawl nor nothing!" exclaimed the widow as they entered. "Why, miss, who have you got there, for mercy's sake? Is she dead?"

"A poor creature to whom you showed kindness when every one besides turned their backs upon her, Mrs. Allison; Kitty Reeves."

"Laws a me! you don't say so! Where in the world did you find her?"

"I'll tell you all about that, by and by. We must get her into bed at once. She is not dead, but insensible from cold and exposure; and hunger, too, no doubt." Then she added in a whisper, "I

will pay you for your trouble, and bear all expenses."

"Oh, miss, I'm sure I'd do all I could for her without thinking about pay; but I'm a poor, lone woman—"

"Hush!" interrupted Freddie, hastily. "Get the bed ready, while I try to warm her by the fire. We must have hot water, and hot bricks, and flannels, and no end of things."

Gilbert Bracebridge, meanwhile, had seated himself in front of the fire with his burthen, and having thrown aside the dripping cloak, was alternately chafing the hands and the spine of the unfortunate girl.

Freddie placed the baby, which remained most unnaturally quiet, in the snug recess of Mrs. Allison's cushioned chair, and assisted, energetically, in the work of resuscitation.

With a placid brow, that faithfully concealed the agitation of his soul, Gilbert watched her, where she knelt on the cottage floor and ministered, like a sister, to the poor lost creature. She drew off the old worn-out boots and ragged stockings, and while she warmed and rubbed the thin, soiled feet with her strong hands, they looked so helpful and sympathetic, that Gilbert thought he must have loved her had he seen nothing of her but those hands. The woman whom he held so tenderly on his knees seemed to him like a myth, and the only real thing, in this world, to him, was that kneeling girl.

He knew not how long this had lasted, when Mrs.

Allison bustled in, bringing a blanket, which she made hot by the fire, chattering all the time. Then he was requested to carry Kitty up-stairs, which he did mechanically, and returned to his place by the fire, saying he would wait, in case they might have to send for a doctor.

While Freddie and the widow were busy with the invalid, he sank into a reverie, from which he was aroused by Freddie, who came flying down the narrow stairs with a small phial in her hand.

"Look here!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing with indignation; "this is the cause of that poor baby's heavy sleep! *Soothing Syrup indeed!* Oh, the wretch who sells such poisonous trash ought to be shut up in prison for life! He is far more guilty than a mere thief who only steals money, for he steals the health and brains of helpless infants. There, that's disposed of!" And she threw the phial into the fire.

"It is indeed lamentable that such things should be used," said Gilbert; "but while mothers are so ignorant as to be unaware that they are ruining the health of their children, and training them to be drunkards by creating an appetite for stimulants, there will always be found druggists, scarcely less ignorant, who will sell the poison to them. How is the poor girl now?"

"Better, thank you," replied Freddie, who was now occupied with the baby. "She has had some hot tea and some food, and is getting warm. But why did you not hold this poor little thing to the fire?"

"To confess the truth, I had forgotten its existence," he answered, with a sad smile. "I was very brutal, I confess, to be so pre-occupied with a matter of more than life and death to myself, that I overlooked that small atom of humanity. Can I do anything to make amends for my crime?"

"No," she said; "it needs only warmth, till it sleeps off the effect of that horrible drug."

"Then I am wanted no more," he continued, with a sigh.

"I am very grateful for what you have already done," said Freddie. "I believe she would be dead, but for you."

"Tut, *I* did nothing," said Gilbert. "*I* did not take off my cloak to wrap her in. But I must go."

He rose, and stood for a few moments looking down at her, as she sat on a low stool, holding the baby's little shrivelled feet to the fire.

"Shall you come to America?" he asked, at length, with an obvious effort.

"I think so," she said, softly, as if ashamed of the confession.

"And shall you go to the South—say to South Carolina—to teach?"

"I shall try to do so," she answered, in the same voice.

"Take as many testimonials as you can, and apply to the Freedmen's Bureau, in New York or Boston. They will send you where you are most needed. Good-bye!"

He offered his hand. As she placed hers in it,

she looked up. Their eyes met, and his were so full of sorrow that her own brimmed with tears, and she turned aside to hide them. He laid his left hand lightly on her head, and bending over her, breathed rather than uttered the words, "May God forever bless you!" then strode out of the cottage.

Suddenly recollecting that her own clothes were wet through, she called to Mrs. Allison to take charge of the baby, and hastened home. But it was in vain that she looked up and down the road. The tall figure that she hoped to see was nowhere visible.

Mrs. Templeman, who had flattered herself that Freddie had escaped the storm by returning from Chester by rail, and that she was even now waiting at the station "till the dregs of the storm were past," insisted upon putting her to bed immediately, and so overwhelmed her with care and coddling that she had no opportunity to relate her adventure. Subsequent reflection told her that it was as well to keep silence altogether upon this subject, as Kitty's return to the village must be anything but pleasant to Mrs. Templeman. "So," thought Freddie, "if anybody else likes to tell her, they may. I'll say nothing to annoy her."

It was pleasant to lie in her warm bed, watching the flickering firelight, and recall every word which that interesting stranger had said: yet when, at last, Freddie fell asleep, her pillow was wet with tears.

CHAPTER XIII.

FREDDIE DREAMS.

CONTRARY to Mrs. Templeman's predictions, Freddie suffered no ill effects from her drenching, but was up as usual in the morning, and accompanied her friend to the station.

On her way home, she called at Mrs. Allison's. Kitty was unable to leave her bed, and the widow was feeding the baby. Kitty was so sick that Freddie fetched the doctor, who pronounced the case to be utterly hopeless, and her death to be only a question of time: a few weeks at most, or it might be a few days. She was far gone in consumption.

Freddie made up her mind at once. Kitty's parents must know of her condition, and must, if possible, be brought to visit and forgive her. It was a hard task to undertake. For a young girl like herself, it was a hard and a delicate one, for the father had denounced the most horrible imprecations on the frail creature when she fled in disgrace from the village.

But Freddie knew she was acting in a good cause, and the touch of that tremulous hand upon her head,

and the murmured blessing, inspired her with courage to do anything that her conscience told her was right.

Mr. Reeves, Kitty's father, was a small farmer. He was at work in the barn-yard when she came up, but he turned away, pretending not to see her, for he had looked no one straight in the face since his daughter ran away.

"Mr. Reeves," said Freddie, "will you come into the house? I want to speak to you and your wife, both together."

He looked about, as if trying to find an excuse, but finally walked towards the house. It was easier than speaking.

"I don't know how to begin," she said, when the gloomy couple stood before her in the farm-house kitchen.

"Please to be smart about it, whatever it is, Miss Wilson," said the farmer, nervously, "for I've got to cut turnips for the cows."

"It is something so dreadful!" cried Freddie, suddenly realizing the full horror of her message to these poor people, now that she was called upon to utter it; and, covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears.

"O Lord, be merciful!" exclaimed Mrs. Reeves, "is my poor child dead?"

Freddie, though crushed beneath the sense of her utter incompetency to manage her communication so as best to move the stern father's feelings, yet saw at once the advantage she would gain if the

belief in Kitty's death drew from him any token of sorrow. She therefore remained silent.

"May God forgive her!" he said, solemnly.

"And cannot you forgive her, too?" said Freddie, eagerly.

"It's too late," he replied.

"No, it is not too late! She is not dead yet; but she is dying. She was out in that dreadful storm yesterday, and if I had not found her, she must have perished by the road-side. Another person carried her to widow Allison's; and there she lies, and can never rise from her bed again. Oh, will you not go to her? If she has sinned, she has suffered and repented. You hope that God will forgive her, and are you more righteous than He is, that *you* cannot forgive?"

The farmer pulled his hat over his eyes, and went out, muttering something about "cutting them turnips."

Freddie wrung her hands and looked towards the unhappy mother, who was vainly trying to untie her apron strings.

"*You* will go to her," she said, loosening the knot and helping her to put on her shawl and bonnet; "don't stop for anything else. She has every comfort, and you can take little dainties to her by and by."

She led the poor woman down the road which, having a few houses scattered here and there along its sides, was called the village street, when, behold, at some distance before them, walking with

long strides towards Mrs. Allison's, they saw the farmer!

Freddie had gained her point. The parents were reconciled to their erring child, and the short residue of her life was made happy by their love and care. Her mother took the baby, but the little creature had been too often stupefied by the Soothing Syrup (that real "blessing to mothers" who desire to be rid of their children) which poor Kitty had given it under the belief that it would save it from pain and hunger; and in a few months it was placed by the side of its mother.

After seeing the farmer and his wife enter widow Allison's door, Freddie returned home, feeling contented, and worked so hard at house cleaning the rest of the day that she was tired when she went to bed.

The presentiment, or whatever the feeling might have been, which had made her so urgent with Mrs. Templeman to put her money in the bank, had entirely disappeared during the excitement of the previous evening, and the busy occupations of the day had not tended to re-awaken it.

That night, however, she had a dream that impressed her so forcibly by its realism that even the bright sunshine could not wholly dispel the unpleasant effect.

She dreamed that she was awakened from sleep by a knowledge — how acquired she knew not, for she heard no noise—that Ernest Templeman had broken into the house, accompanied by another man, whose face she could not see; indeed, he

seemed to have no face. She saw them in Mrs. Templeman's parlor, breaking open and ransacking her desk, and every other place where money might be concealed. They then cautiously mounted the stairs. By some means they opened her door, though it was locked, and Ernest Templeman entered. At this moment she uttered a loud cry and woke; but, so powerful was the impression left by the vision, that it was some time before she could feel quite sure that the hated being was not in her room.

It was only three o'clock; yet she obtained a light and dressed herself. Then she emptied a large trunk of its contents, and pressing a spring that held it in its place, she removed a false bottom, beneath which lay a variety of incongruous articles, which, being very loth to part with them, she had secreted in this manner before she came to Mrs. Templeman's school. There was the Indian bow and quiver of arrows, of exquisite workmanship, in the use of which she had acquired extraordinary skill, in the character of Diana. There was the suit of sailor's clothes, in which she danced the hornpipe so saucily that the women, taking her for a boy, fell in love with her, though, thanks to good old Mr. Powell's fatherly watchfulness, she saw but one of the silly letters which they addressed to her. And there lay her violin, on which she was a very good performer. And there, too, was the object of which she was in search,—a "gold-mounted Colt,"—her beautiful revolver, with which she used to snuff

candles, and split its neat little bullets on the edge of a knife, and perform other feats not often practised by girls. She examined this little weapon carefully; then loaded it, replaced everything in order, and lying down again, with her revolver in her hand, she slept soundly till daylight.

The dream haunted her all the day. She knew she was in no danger while armed, yet as she had no wish to be compelled to shoot the son of her dear friend, however he might deserve it, she determined during Mrs. Templeman's absence, to occupy a room adjoining that used by the domestics.

Before retiring to rest, she paid a visit to her own room, carrying in her hand a packet of very sharp iron carpet tacks.

"I dreamed," she soliloquized, "that he came up stairs in his stocking feet, as it is most likely he would do. So, *if* he comes, I'll make it pleasant for him."

Saying this, she strewed the tacks thickly over the carpet, and went to her repose with an unruffled conscience.

The house was large, and the front part, being much newer than the back, was entirely separated from it, and only communicated with it by doors, all of which Freddie secured over night. Consequently, if the discordant sound that awoke her in the "dead waste and middle of the night," was a yell of pain from the front part of the house, it must have been a very loud yell indeed.

To sleep again after such an awakening was im-

possible. She wrapped herself up warmly, opened the window, and sat watching and listening, for she imagined they would come and go that way, as it was the easiest mode of gaining access to the premises. She had not been long at her post when she heard the sound of shuffling feet on the gravel path below, mingled with oaths, curses, and suppressed cries of pain. The night was dark, for "the moon had gone down, and the stars were few," but she had no difficulty in recognizing the voice of Ernest Templeman.

She slept no more till she heard the servants stirring, and was soon after aroused by their terrified voices at her door, assuring her that robbers had broken into the house and carried off everything they could lay their hands on. The latter part of the story was, of course, an invention of their excited imaginations. Finding no money, Ernest Templeman would take nothing else, would not even search for anything worth taking, since he knew that all his mother's silver plate had been sold some years before to pay his debts, and its place supplied by "electro."

After having hastily inspected the state of things in the parlor, Freddie ran up stairs, and could not help feeling a savage satisfaction on observing that every step was stained with blood. By the door of her room there was quite a pool, where he had probably sat down to pick the tacks out of his feet.

"It must have been a severe punishment," she

thought; "yet no more than he deserved. And after all, it was better than shooting him."

Freddie was in a considerable difficulty how to act under the circumstances. It would never do to denounce Mrs. Templeman's son as the perpetrator of this outrage, neither could the affair be passed over without notice. Again, it would be quite useless to alarm Mrs. Templeman by telling her about it before her return home, and yet it would be assuming too much on her part if she refrained from doing so. So Freddie put the burthen quietly off her own shoulders by sending for the clergyman, who was an intimate friend of Mrs. Templeman's.

He acted with promptitude to the best of his judgment. The police were of course called in, and they made a great many clever guesses, according to their wont; discovered many curious facts relating to the way in which an entrance had been effected; were positive that the burglars were not *professionals;* promised to do their utmost to discover the criminals; and every night sent one of their number to sleep on the premises, in case the attack should be renewed.

The Inspector was rather disagreeably inquisitive respecting the presence of the tacks on the floor of Freddie's room, and asked many questions; but Freddie adhered to her first simple statement, which was perfectly true, and he could get nothing more from her. She was not going to tell her dreams to a policeman!

So the affair rested till Mrs. Templeman's return;

and by that time, although the specified "nine days" had not elapsed, it had ceased to be a wonder.

The young lady who accompanied her from town was no other than Winifred Trevanian. Events had occurred, which will be detailed in due time, rendering it imperative that a new home should be provided for her, and Mr. Mason, when applied to by the Earl, had recommended Mrs. Templeman as a suitable person to take charge of her.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFIDENCES.

Now that my two heroines, whose fortunes are destined, henceforth, to be closely linked together, have at last met under one roof, it is time that I should describe them.

Freddie was very tall, being much above the ordinary stature of women. Her figure was the very perfection of symmetry, and no one would have suspected the immense strength that lay concealed under its rounded and graceful contours. Her face was not beautiful—that is, the features were far from regular; yet she was generally considered handsome. Her complexion glowed with health, and her mouth, rather large, and always ready to laugh or smile, when the full, red lips were parted, showed a set of strong white teeth, "like a palace of pearls," the lower set being supported by a well-moulded jaw. Her hair, of a rich brown color with a tinge of gold in it, clustered round her large, well-developed head and ample forehead, in a profusion of short, natural curls. Her eyes were dark gray, usually very calm and quiet; though, when she became animated, they beamed beneath the straight,

dark eye-brows, with light and intelligence. Her nose was slightly *retroussé;* but, with the short upper lip, gave an air of piquancy to her face, that was better than more regular beauty. Her feet and hands were finely formed; not too small for her size, and strong, supple, and elastic, like the rest of her harmonious frame.

Freda was very different. In stature she was little above the common height, but her slender figure was well proportioned, and exquisitely graceful. Hers was one of those faces about which no two opinions could exist. It was simply perfect in its high patrician cast of beauty. Her long hair, fine and soft as silk, though raven black, grew low upon her broad white brow, while her large eyes, shaded by long black lashes, were of that lovely violet blue that is seldom seen except among the most favored of the daughters of Erin. Her complexion appeared delicate from its purity, but the rose upon her cheek was the symbol of health, without which true beauty cannot exist. Her nose was slightly aquiline, and faultless in its contour. Her mouth—what a difficult thing it is to describe such a mouth! I'll say, then, that the upper lip had the form of Cupid's bow, (and so, by the bye, had Freddie's, on a larger scale,) and that the under one was neither thin, nor very full, and then I see how impossible it is for words to convey an idea of that which the painter's art could barely place upon canvas. I must leave that mouth, with its small, regular teeth, rosy lips, and the Grecian chin, with its central dimple, to be imagined.

Her small feet were delicately arched, and her hands were slender and dimpled, like those which Raphael gives to his Madonnas. For the rest, she was a warm-hearted, sweet-tempered girl, and not too conscious of her own loveliness.

Freddie's first emotion, on beholding her namesake, was that of such profound admiration that she could have knelt to her.

"Can she be mortal?" she exclaimed, the first time she found herself alone with Mrs. Templeman; "I could not have believed it possible for any merely earthly creature to be so lovely! It is a joy only to look at her! Did you ever see any one so beautiful?"

"No, I never did," was the reply, "and yet, my Winifred, there is a beauty in the soul which is wholly free from every envious or selfish feeling that, to my mind, is more attractive than any outward perfection of form or feature."

"But, dear Mrs. Templeman, I am sure she is as good as she is beautiful. Did you not observe how sweet her smile is, and how winning her manners?"

"My child, I believe her to be a very sweet girl, and I am all the more inclined to love her, because she is unfortunate and unhappy."

"*She* unfortunate! *She* unhappy!" cried Freddie. "The world must be altogether wrong, some way, if that's the case. What can make her unhappy?"

"She is an orphan, and almost friendless," replied Mrs. Templeman.

"Why, so am I," said Freddie, "yet that does not

make me unhappy; because I am used to it, I suppose. And then I have always—or *almost* always—had a kind friend, who was like father or mother to me. And you will be a mother to her, too, will you not, dear Mrs. Templeman?"

"I will give her all the love that you do not monopolize, you rogue," said Mrs. Templeman, kissing her warmly; "and now, will you go to her and help her to unpack and arrange her things? She is here for the sake of being under motherly care, rather than to study, for she is already highly accomplished."

Freddie was delighted to return to the contemplation of her idol; but when more familiar intercourse convinced her that that idol was merely a girl like herself, and that she was even her inferior in regard to general information and worldly wisdom, her feelings underwent a change, and though she did not admire her less, she loved her more.

The discovery, which in their innocent girlish chat was soon made, that their names were identical, and the day of their birth the same, drew them together still more, and they felt as if they were twin sisters, though born so many thousand miles apart.

They did not, it is true, interchange vows of everlasting affection, in the orthodox young-lady style, and each kept locked in her own breast some secrets that she would not confide to any one; but they were Freddie and Freda to each other from the first day of their acquaintance.

Mrs. Templeman was soon informed of Kitty's return to the village, and Freddie, when questioned by her, told her frankly all about it, including her successful intervention with the hitherto obdurate parents. On one point only was she somewhat reticent; she said merely that a man, a stranger, who was going along the lane, had carried poor Kitty to the cottage. This reticence was not the result of cunning, but of maiden modesty; and Mrs. Templeman, with all her maternal shrewdness, failed to discover any connecting link between the fact of a stranger having carried Kitty through the storm, and Freddie's unusual devotion to the study of American geography.

However, chance betrayed to Mrs. Templeman another fact that Freddie was equally anxious to conceal. The incident of the tacks had of course been related to her, among the other circumstances connected with the burglary; and when Freddie, from deference for his mother's feelings, and not for any interest she felt in himself, asked how she had found Mr. Templeman, she replied, "He was out in the country, shooting, when I first called at his chambers. I had sent him a note the night I arrived, to let him know I was coming, but it seems he did not find it till his return. The next day I went again, and found him in bed, poor boy. He had lamed himself by stepping on a spike—"

Here she stopped, turned deadly pale, and left the room.

A few evenings later, in the twilight, she said to Freddie, in a studiously unconcerned tone:

"I wish you would tell me, my love, why you were so anxious that I should place that money in the bank before I went to town?"

"It was only a feeling that I had, ma'am; a kind of presentiment," replied Freddie.

"And what induced you to change your room?"

"Oh, that was a dream," she said; "I dreamed that two men broke into the house, and afterwards came into my room. The dream haunted me, and I thought I should not sleep well there, so I moved into one of the back rooms."

"Why did you not mention this remarkable dream to Mr. Benson?"

"Oh, yes," said Freddie, laughing rather nervously, "and get pointed at all over the village as a seer of visions!"

"Did you not scatter those tacks on the floor purposely?"

She had got to the point now that Freddie dreaded; but there was no escape.

"Yes, ma'am, I did," answered Freddie, in a penitent tone, "and I am sorry for it, if the men were much hurt."

"Whoever the man might be who went to your room," said Mrs. Templeman, in a voice so stern that Freddie hardly knew it, "he went for a villainous purpose; and if he is maimed for life, he deserves his punishment. Therefore, my child, do not regret what you have done."

No more was said at that time, but Freddie heard, incidentally, some weeks later, that Ernest Templeman had quite recovered from his *accident.*

The school re-commenced, and the months flew by, as they always do when every day brings its appointed work, until the first of May arrived, when the two Winifreds attained their twenty-first birthday.

Mr. Mason wrote a letter to Freddie, resigning his stewardship, and giving over to her own keeping the sum that had accumulated in his hands during the three years when she had been with the circus company, as well as Mr. Powell's legacy and savings from the presents he had intercepted, so that she found herself in possession of about six hundred pounds.

Freddie wrote a grateful and graceful letter of thanks for all his kindness, but whether he received it or not, she never knew. A few days later, Mrs. Templeman was informed that the old gentleman had died very suddenly. Freddie lamented his loss sincerely. She had very seldom seen him, indeed, but he had always been to her the distant *some one* who represented her father.

She was sitting, in the twilight of a sweet May evening, in a secluded part of the garden, indulging in what was, to her, the very unusual occupation of a sorrowful reverie. She had lost a faithful friend. This was the third time in her short life that death had left her with only one link to unite her with the rest of humanity, and twice out of those three times it was the old lawyer who had remained as the bond

of union. Now he was gone, and she had only Mrs. Templeman left; and that poor lady's private sorrows so completely absorbed her from all beyond absolute duties, that Freddie felt she had but a feeble claim upon her. The remembrance of the stranger, his kind talk and gentle manners, and his parting benediction, came to her, bringing a sense of comfort. Yet why should she take comfort from thinking of him? She would never see him again! And she rested her head against the back of the rustic seat, and wept. She believed she was crying because her old friend was dead!

Freda's arms around her, and her soft voice, cooing consolation, roused her from her grief.

"It is so dreadful to lose a friend," she said; "but, O Freddie, I remember when my mother died, and the circumstances were so terrible! It is all like some fearful dream. Our house was burnt, and I was told that the fright and agitation killed her. But I don't believe that. I believe she was murdered!"

"Murdered!" cried Freddie, starting up. "Oh, Freda, who could have done it?"

"That I must not say," replied Freda, sadly. "That is the 'skeleton in the closet' that I must keep locked up all my life. He was related to my mother, or had power over her, and that night he locked me up at the top of the house, and then set fire to it. I know he did, for I heard her scream and beg him not. The smoke began to come through the crevices of the door, when I heard a voice calling me by name and telling me to knock on the door to

guide him to it. That was my guardian. It was the first time I saw him. He carried me down through the stifling smoke, and we got through a window, and escaped down the trellis. Then he went in and brought my mother out. She was pale and senseless, but I had often seen her faint, so I was not frightened. We were taken to a convent of nuns, and there my poor mamma lay in bed for I do not know how long; but she did not get up again, and I am certain she was murdered. She was not touched by the fire, and there was a great bruise upon her chest. I never saw *him* again, and for a long time I believed (though I know not what foundation I had for it) that he had been tried for the murder, and executed. But a short time before I came here an attempt was made to take me by force from the convent, where I have told you before that my guardian left me to be educated, after my mother's death. I did not see the man whose name I will never mention, for they all wore masks; but I thought I recognized his voice; and oh, unless you knew all, you could not conceive a thousandth part of the terror and loathing with which it inspired me! From what I heard my captors say, they were searching my room for some jewels. Now I never possessed any jewels, though I know my mother had some, which she used to call my dowry. But I supposed they were burnt in the fire that destroyed our house. The ruffians had bound me, and tied something over my mouth, so that I could not cry for help, but their delaying to search for those jewels

saved me. One of the nuns heard them, and gave the alarm. Many of those Sisters of Charity are strong country women. They came armed with sticks, and the men had to fight hard to get away from them. My guardian came immediately from England, and took me away with him. We remained in London for a few days, and then Mrs. Templeman came, and brought me here. And now, dear Freddie, you see that there is at least one other person in the world quite as lonely and friendless as you are."

"How can you say so, Freda, when you have that dear, kind guardian!" cried Freddie, who had listened with the deepest interest to her friend's recital.

"I cannot extract much comfort from my associations with him," answered Freda, sadly. "There is grief and mystery there, too. He shuns me, Freddie! His manner towards me is altered and estranged. When first he used to come to see me at the convent, he was kind and loving as—as—"

"As a father," suggested Freddie.

"I do not know what the love of a father is like," said Freda, hurriedly, as a gloomy cloud passed over her lovely brow; "but my guardian was as kind as ever he could be till about four years ago. Then, just when I had discovered more and more all that was good and lovable in his character, when I was old enough to begin to appreciate him, when I had begun to watch and long for his visits, and to count the days till I might hope to see him again, then,

suddenly, his manner became constrained, and his visits were shortened, and a longer and longer time elapsed between them. What I had done to alienate him, I cannot imagine."

"Is he married?" inquired Freddie, rather abruptly. Her experience in novel reading was coming into play, to discover a cause for this strange change of mood.

"Married!" repeated Freda, with a look of alarm. "Oh, no! no! And yet," she added, covering her face with her hands, and sobbing, "how can I say that he is not? I know *nothing* of him! *Nothing!* Not even his name, except his Christian name of Rupert."

"That is very singular," said the judicial Freddie, bent more than ever on fathoming the mystery. "Did the Superior of the convent know who he was?"

"She must have known, for she wrote to him. But she would not tell me."

"There is a mystery about him, certainly," continued Freddie; "but that does not necessarily mean that there is anything wrong. The man you have described is too noble for that."

Freda smiled her approbation.

"But, my dear Freda, you have betrayed one thing, and that is, that you are in love with your guardian Rupert."

Freda hid her blushing face in her friend's neck.

"And you have convinced me of another thing,"

proceeded Freddie, encircling her companion with her arm, "and that is, that he loves you."

"No! That is impossible!" murmured Freda. "He is so much my superior in all things; he could not love me."

"Now, just listen to that!" exclaimed Freddie, appealing to the surrounding vegetation apparently, for there was nothing else within hearing. "As if any man could look at her and not love her! Oh, Freda, don't you know that you are beautiful beyond any power of description?"

"I know that you are a dreadful flatterer," said Freda. "But, Freddie dear, tell me why you think that—you know what I mean—why you think as you do."

"From his change of conduct, which is to be explained on no other grounds. From some motive, he does not think it right or honorable to declare his love. It may be only that he, being so much older than you are, dares not aspire to the possession of so much loveliness. It is *possible* that he may be married; but, if so, it is to an uncongenial partner, one to whom he could not confide the child he rescued from the fire."

"You have thrown quite another light upon his conduct, Freddie. Oh, I wish I could believe that you are right!"

"What name did he give Mrs. Templeman?"

"She did not see him!" answered Freda. "It was all arranged through Mr. Mason. When Mrs. Templeman came to fetch me from the hotel, she

asked for the young lady in No. 16. I came out, closely veiled, and kept my veil down, by Rupert's desire, till I arrived here."

"When will he come to see you?"

"Never, I fear."

The bell, ringing for evening prayers, interrupted them; but they were closer and warmer friends than ever, after this confidential interview.

CHAPTER XV.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

THE Earl had not had a very pleasant time during the nine years which had elapsed since Captain Grainger's first visit. He worked on his farm as assiduously as ever; but it was no longer with the hope of accumulating a little fortune for Freda; it was merely to save her jewels from the rapacity of that unscrupulous extortionist. Sometimes he was even compelled, though always with extreme reluctance, to draw upon his inherited property to satisfy his demands.

Since his mother's death, he had scarcely seemed to look upon his ancestral estates as his own; but acting as steward, he lived upon the salary of one, supplemented by his earnings on the farm.

Captain Grainger's demands were very irregular. At times he would give his victim a respite of several months, and again he would write for money with scarcely a week's intermission. Occasionally he repeated his threat of appealing to Freda; but the Earl paid little regard to these demonstrations, not believing that the rascal was acquainted with her retreat. When, however, after demanding a

large sum, which the Earl could not, and would not send, the attack upon the convent was made, Freda's anxious guardian saw that she was no longer in safety there, and removed her to Mrs. Templeman's with every precaution to prevent discovery, as has already been made known in the last chapter.

The persecution was then renewed with increased vigor, and assumed a new form of annoyance; for, if a demand for money was not immediately complied with, it was enforced by the appearance of the Captain in person. Unfortunately, Captain Grainger quickly discovered that this mode was a very effectual one, as the Earl, besides the loathing he felt for him, personally, was greatly annoyed by being haunted by this mysterious and disreputable-looking stranger.

There is, however, a degree of tension at which the toughest cord must break; and this Captain Grainger discovered to his cost.

It was towards the end of June. The Earl was pacing rapidly up and down his library, the inequality of his steps betraying the agitation of his mind. On the table lay an open letter from Grainger, containing an imperative demand for a hundred pounds, though the Earl had sent him twenty only a week before.

It was not the question of money that troubled him, but the desperate step towards which this incessant black-mailing was hurrying him.

"It must come to this at last," he soliloquized. "However I delay it, it *must* come to this! I ought

to have done it years ago, and should, but that I had a duty to perform to that child. And now that she is a child no more; now that I have learned to love her—O God, how tenderly! how truly!—now, it is more than ever imperative on me to take this irrevocable step. I dare not see her again, or my resolution might fail me. Even at our last meeting, I read that in her sweet eyes which might develop into love. Love for me, old and ugly as I am! Poor child, she knew no others to compare me with! But she will; she will, and then she will forget me. That Mrs. Templeman is a woman to be trusted, I am sure, and my Freda will go into a small but select social circle; that is what the good soul said to Mason. My Freda's beauty and grace will do the rest. Ah me, that I must never know her fate! That seems the sharpest blow of all; but it must be borne. I will take her jewels to her—her mother's jewels—that I have struggled so hard to preserve for her. I shall be once more under the same roof with her; but I must not see her. It is hard—it is hard to bear! By to-morrow morning that fellow Grainger will be here as usual. I shall have time to go to London, make my arrangements, and then to Brighton. If he follows me there, so much the better. Then comes the last scene of all. The Earl is dead; long live the Earl! That will be the easiest part of it. And finally, a certain Rupert Forester makes his way to Australia, or New Zealand, or the Sandwich Islands, or the United States, according to the vessel that sails first. Well, the world is wide enough."

His first care was to destroy Grainger's letter; and having watched it as it was consumed to the last atom, he packed his valise with sufficient linen to last him a week, placed the casket containing Winifred's Jewels safely in it, and told his servants he was going to spend a few days at Brighton. There was half an hour to spare before the train started, so he went to the stable and patted his horse. He thought the creature had never been so demonstrative in his affection. His dogs, too, came round him with a look of yearning love in their honest eyes that seemed to say they knew he was going from them forever.

"I thought I could go hence without a pang," said the Earl to himself, with a choking sensation about the throat, "but I find I cannot. These creatures are dearer to me than I supposed."

Then came the old gardener, wanting to carry his Lordship's valise to the station.

"It isn't fit," he said, "that your Lordship should carry your own luggage."

"And I am sure it would be far less fit were I to burthen you, old friend, with what I am so much better able to carry. Good-bye, Ralph; take care of Rollo and the dogs while I am away."

He shook hands with his old servant, and pressed something into his palm as he did so. Then snatching up his valise, he strode hurriedly away.

Ralph hastened after, anxious, he knew not why, to keep him in sight as long as possible. When he could see him no longer, he looked at what he had in his hand. It was a five-pound note.

"My mind misgives me," said the old man, while tears rolled down his withered yet ruddy cheeks; "my mind misgives me that I shall never see him again. I do hope there's nothing a-going to happen to him! He's been a good master, but there's been a something a-weighing upon his mind this ever so long. Ay, ever since his mother's death, it's been a-weighing upon him, dreadful."

It was late that evening when the Earl presented himself at Ashford house, and requested to see Mrs. Templeman.

She was not at home, the servant said. To his anxious inquiry when she would return, the girl answered that it was impossible to say, as she was gone to London to her son, who was dangerously ill.

"Is there any one else here?" His heart beat violently as he asked this question, for should the reply be, "Miss Trevanian," he would be compelled to see her. He should see her and speak to her once more, and no blame would be his for seeking her. But his wild hope was dashed to the ground when the girl replied that "perhaps he would like to see Miss Wilson; she was one of the teachers, and almost like Mrs. Templeman's own daughter."

Freddie was accordingly summoned.

When she entered the parlor, she found a man of, as she imagined, about thirty-five years of age, with a prepossessing, though by no means handsome face, a good, well-formed figure, and very gentlemanly manner.

"Miss Wilson?" he said, rising as she came in.

"I am Miss Wilson, sir," replied Freddie. "I understand you wished to see Mrs. Templeman; but she is unavoidably absent. I can tell you anything you wish to know concerning the school."

"It is not that," said the Earl, nervously; "there is, I believe, a young lady here, a Miss Trevanian—"

"Oh, you are her guardian, I am certain!" cried Freddie, joyously; "I'll fetch her this moment; she'll be so delighted!"

"Not for the world!" he exclaimed, starting forward as if to prevent her; "she must not know that I am here. I dare not see her."

"I cannot presume to judge of your conduct, sir, not knowing your motives," said Freddie, gravely; "but permit me to say that I do not think you do Miss Trevanian justice in denying her the pleasure which it would afford her to see you."

"No," he replied, with a sigh so deep that it was almost a groan, "you do not know my motives, nor does she. They never can be known, for they must go with me to the grave. Freda will think me eccentric—mad, perhaps. But, oh, young lady, can you not persuade her that I am forced to act as I do; that I am impelled by no unworthy or dishonorable impulse?"

"No persuasion would be needed to convince Freda of that," said Freddie; "she esteems you as the very soul of honor."

"Thank you for that comfort," he said; "the remembrance of your words will be like a gleam of

light in my dark future. And is she well? Is she happy?"

"She is well; but not, I fear, so happy as she might be."

"She pines for society, no doubt," said the Earl, resolutely. "Mrs. Templeman has promised to take her out, and she will be happy in a gayer life."

"She has refused all invitations hitherto," said Freddie.

"That cannot last," said he. "At her age, pleasure always has attractions. She will meet with some one who will make life bright for her, and God grant he may be worthy of her love! And now to the business on which I came. This box," he continued, taking the jewel-case from his valise, "contains some articles of value which belonged to her mother. Be pleased to give it at once into her own hands. And this letter will explain all that I *can* explain. Miss Wilson, will you be as a sister to her?"

"I will, indeed, sir. I promise it freely, for I love her like a sister."

"She is so inexperienced in the world's ways," he went on, "and she may need a counsellor, even a protector. You look resolute and courageous—"

"I believe my looks speak truly, then," said Freddie.

"You will hardly believe it possible," continued the Earl, "that that lovely girl can have a mortal enemy. I hope that, in placing her here, I have baffled him; but he has the cunning of a fox, and the pertinacity of a bloodhound. Give me a sheet

of paper, and I will sketch such an outline of his face that you will easily recognize him, should he track her. The name under which I have known him is Grainger—Captain Grainger. I know not if it be his true name or not."

Freddie gave him some paper, and with a few masterly strokes he produced an excellent likeness of Captain Grainger.

"He has lost an eye," he said, "and wears a glass one, and his face is scarred all over. He says it was done in the army. Should such a man come here, no matter under what pretext, his true motive will be robbery. Hide this from him," tapping the box; "and hurry Freda away to some place of concealment, or safety. Will you promise me this?"

"I will," replied Freddie, resolutely. "And what is more, if he breaks into the house by force, I will shoot him. Some burglars got in once, and ever since I have slept with a revolver under my pillow."

"That sounds well," said the Earl; "but could you hit a mark?"

"It is not an accomplishment that I usually boast of," said Freddie, modestly; "but as it may afford you some comfort to know it, I will tell you that I had an opportunity, once, of practising a good deal, and I won many prizes. But I think the best thing Freda could do, would be to go with me to America."

"To America!" he repeated, while such a strange mingling of emotions passed over his face, that

Freddie could not tell whether terror or joy predominated.

"Yes," she replied, with the air of one whose plans were all settled long ago, though her resolution had only been finally adopted within the last few minutes. "I am going to teach in the schools for the poor emancipated negroes in South Carolina; and Freda could not do better than go, too, in my opinion. Shall I tell her that you support my recommendation?"

"My opinion can no longer influence her," said the Earl, sadly. "When she reads that letter, she will know that she will never see me more."

"You are not going to commit suicide!" exclaimed Freddie, clutching his arm with a vigor that he afterwards recalled with astonishment.

"No; do not suppose that for a moment," he answered, so calmly, that her fear was instantly allayed. "You and Freda must be satisfied to take my assurance that I am doing what my conscience tells me is right. Though wholly guiltless in this matter, I am involved in a net-work of falsity. I cannot break out of this openly, without bringing ruin and misery upon others. Therefore, I withdraw myself quietly from the position, and shall be seen no more."

"You are going to turn monk, and bury yourself alive in a convent. Perhaps in that horrible La Trappe!"

"You must surmise what you please. Good-bye. Be kind to Freda."

When the parlor door was opened, Freda's voice was heard from the distant room where the two girls had been sitting when Freddie was called away to the Earl. The song she sang was one of Mrs. Hemans',—that wild, plaintive lament of the Highland emigrants about to leave their native land forever, and the wailing notes and sorrowful words, "We return no more," fell with fearful meaning on the ears of the unhappy man. He raised his hand, entreating silence, and listened eagerly. Freda sang without accompaniment, and her sweet, yet powerful voice vibrated with emotion, for her soul was poured forth in every note. The Earl leaned against the door-post, and Freddie saw that his whole frame trembled, and she heard his tears as they dropped upon the floor.

"Let me call her!" she whispered, in a broken voice.

"No—no!" he answered, "if it costs my life, I must be firm."

He staggered to the door.

Freddie accompanied him. When he had passed outside, she offered him her hand, and held his in a firm grip for a moment.

"You have asked me many questions," she said, at last, in a low, hurried tone; "will you answer me one, or perhaps two, and if they offend you, I cannot help it."

"I will answer them if I can," he replied.

"Are you married?"

"No; on my soul, I am not!"

"Is there insanity in your family?"

"No."

"Good-night." And the strange girl stepped back and closed the door.

"Then they will meet again," she said to herself, as she walked slowly to the room where she had left her friend. "I am sure of it. He is not going to kill himself, and he has too much sense to become a monk. What else he means to do, I cannot imagine. But he will be alive somewhere, and if he does not turn up in South Carolina before very long, he is more of a fool than I take him to be. I have bound myself to go to South Carolina now, just because it was the first State I thought of at the moment. Poor Freda! How it will grieve her to know that he has been here, and is gone without seeing her! It is a painful task to tell her, but it must be done."

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXIT, AND AN ENTRANCE.

After travelling all night, the Earl reached London in the early dawn.

Leaving his valise at the station, he sought out one of those clothing stores where every article of dress can be obtained on the shortest notice. There he purchased a suit of strong dark grey cloth, suitable either for a mechanic, or for a gentleman going on a pedestrian tour. A pair of boots, a few strong shirts and socks, and various other necessary articles, including a leather purse, were packed into a carpet-bag. He added to these a stout walking-stick, and took a cab to London Bridge Station. A train was just starting for Brighton, in which he secured a place, and had the satisfaction of being alone in a first-class carriage.

He left the train unnoticed among the crowds who were pouring out in spite of the unfavorable weather, for it was misty, and a drizzling rain was falling, and, avoiding the town, walked quickly to a part of the shore which he knew well in former times. It was about a mile from Brighton, and was easily distinguished by a rather bold projection of cliff.

He sat down on the shingly beach, at the base of this cliff, and looked carefully around him. As he could not distinguish any object twenty yards off, it was very unlikely that he himself would be observed, even should any one be loitering about in his vicinity. He therefore proceeded at once with the work he had in hand. In the first place, he half buried the carpet-bag in the sand, and then covered it completely with shingle and sea-weed, placing a large light-colored stone on the top to distinguish it from other heaps. He next transferred from his own purse to the new one, the sum of about two hundred pounds, and buried that at a short distance, placing marks about it with great care.

This done, he walked down the beach, and surveyed the spot from the border of the sea. Having by this means impressed all the landmarks upon his memory, he went back to the station, took the next train to London, fetched his valise from the Great Western Station, where he had left it, and suddenly recollected that he had eaten nothing since the previous day. He called a cab, and drove to his club.

"This is a good opportunity," he said to himself, "to block out any unpleasant stories about suicide, or desponding state of mind, or any such humbug."

Acting in accordance with the plan he mentally laid down, he greeted with more than his usual cordiality and cheerfulness every acquaintance he met at the club. He talked freely upon general subjects, and even extended to one or two such an

invitation to Tytherleigh as was conveyed in the expression that he would be happy to show them his stock of short-horns, if they thought it worth while to run down. He talked also of his intended visit to Brighton, and his longing for a half-mile's swim in the sea.

It was evening when he reached Brighton. He went to one of the largest hotels, and found that there was no room there. This he understood to imply, "no room for a man who brought only a small valise, and carried that himself." The presentation of his card proved that he was right in his conjecture, for one of the best rooms in the house was immediately discovered to be vacant. He took possession of it, and strolled out on the beach.

The weather had cleared up since morning, and the sea was dancing and sparkling in the level rays of the setting sun.

When he reached the bathing place he found the machines were all drawn up. There was no one in the water. The men in charge of the machines were about going home.

The Earl's request for a bath was answered by "Too late, sir. We've done for to-day." A handsome gratuity, however, wrought an immediate change in their views. One of the lumbering boxes was pushed out to the sea, and the Earl entered.

Strange and conflicting were the emotions that filled his breast. The irrevocable step was not yet taken. *Should* he take it? he asked himself. Should he not rather keep the rank and wealth which the

law gave him, and which there was no one to dispute with him? Should he not return to Freda—woo her—marry her—place a coronet on her brow, and see his children growing up around him? Had he not suffered enough to expiate another's fault?

No, answered conscience, sternly; not while he held that to which he had no right. Had he found it so agreeable to act the part of an embodied lie, that he must drag the noble and innocent Freda down to share it with him? The course he had determined to adopt was the only honorable one, and he would carry it out, or die in the effort.

He began to undress. It was strange how every garment, as he removed it, assumed the character of an old friend, and roused a feeling of regret at parting with it. Yet it was not the clothes themselves, but the past life and associations which they represented that aroused the sentiment. His watch! How well he remembered the time when he bought it! It was a few days before that which was to have been his wedding day. As he looked at it his eye was caught by a small gold key that was attached to the chain. It was the key of Freda's jewel case! In his agitation he had forgotten to leave it for her!

What could be done? To send it to her now was impossible; to leave it was equally so. He would keep it! It would be a link between her and him—a link to bind him still to humanity. He tore a strip from his handkerchief, and tied the key round his neck. Yet another moment he lingered, gazing

round to see if there was any other thing that he had overlooked.

In this pause he heard some one ask the bath men if they knew the name of the gentleman who was bathing so late. It was strange that during the whole of this agitating day he had hardly bestowed a thought upon Captain Grainger; and here he was, inquiring for him!

With a feeling of joy that he was about to elude him forever, the Earl dashed into the water, and swam straight away from the shore.

There was no moon, and the sun set among clouds which made the twilight short. When the swimmer could no longer discern the men on shore, he shouted for help, and struck out vigorously on a course at right angles from that which he had hitherto pursued.

About two hours after the Earl had disappeared, and while boats, with lighted flambeaux, were still rowing about, seeking for his dead body, a man dressed in a suit of dark grey tweed, with a cap of the same, and a carpet bag slung over his shoulder, entered a country station a few miles from Brighton, and asked if there was a train to Southampton that night.

The drowsy station master answered that there would be one up in half an hour; whereupon the man took a third-class ticket, and ensconced himself in a corner, where he appeared to fall asleep, till the train came lumbering up, and he departed.

When he arrived at Southampton, he sought out

a small public house, such as would be patronized by mechanics and workmen, where he ordered supper and a bed.

His sleep that night, in a small, scantily-furnished room, on a hard coarse bed, was deep and dreamless. He was troubled by no anxious doubts; his soul was torn by no conflicts between the temptations of love and happiness on the one side, and the stern dictates of conscience on the other. His body was wearied by great exertion and the wear and tear of strong mental excitement; but his mind was at rest. It might be the calm of apathy, but it *was* calm.

No one asked his name when he went away in the morning. He had paid his bill, and that was all that was required of him. He walked down to the docks, and after looking at the various steamers lying there, he asked an old salt which vessel would sail first.

"The 'Roarer,'" he replied; "yonder she lays. She's getting up her steam now, and she'll be off in about an hour."

"Where is she going?" asked the man in grey.

"Meriky," replied the tar, squirting out his tobacco-juice, as though the very name of that land of chewers had affected his salivary glands.

The man in grey passed on, found a boat just carrying passengers to the "Aurora," went on board, and engaged a berth in the steerage.

When asked his name, he said it was Rupert Forester.

CHAPTER XVII.

FREDDIE'S SKELETON IN THE CLOSET.

FREDA had resumed her plaintive song when Freddie came back to the parlor. She was sitting at an open window that looked out on the side garden, so that she could not see the visitor as he departed.

Freddie stood with the box in her hands, uncertain how to communicate her distressing news. Freda was not conscious of her presence, but sat with her lovely eyes fixed on the fast-darkening scene without, and her thoughts with him whose footsteps she could almost hear, as he hurried away from her.

Unable to control her feelings any longer, Freddie sat down and began to cry.

"My darling Freddie! What is amiss?" exclaimed Freda, stopping short in her song, and springing to the side of her weeping companion. "Have you heard bad news of Mrs. Templeman? Ah! That box! Did *he* bring it? Where is he? Oh, tell me, quick—where is he?"

"A gentleman brought it," answered Freddie, making a strong effort to control her sobs. "Stop!

stop! dear Freda; it's of no use running to the parlor. He is not there."

"Tell me—tell me—who was he? Not Rupert! He would not go away without seeing me!"

"He gave no name; but he *was* your guardian, Freda."

"And he did not wish to see me!" said Freda, her fine eyes flashing with indignation.

"If you could have seen his grief, and the struggle that he had to do what he knew was right, though it was so hard for him, you would not feel angry with him, Freda. And when he heard you singing that plaintive song, I thought his heart would break. I heard his tears patter like rain upon the floor."

"Oh, why was he so cruel to himself and me?" sobbed Freda.

"I do not know why. He would not tell me. But of this I am certain, Freda; it is nothing wrong nor dishonorable that makes him act in this apparently cruel manner."

The warm pressure of Freda's hand bespoke her gratitude for this defence of the man she loved.

"He said that if you could know all the circumstances, you would entirely approve of what he has done, and is going to do; which is, to disappear altogether, and be seen no more."

"Not to kill himself!" said Freda, in a horrified whisper.

"No, no—certainly not that. It is very strange, very mysterious. But mystery does not necessarily

imply guilt, or even error. Though I have seen him but once, I will never believe any evil of him. I am sure that he is good and noble. Here is a letter that he gave me for you, Freda, and here is your box. I will get a light, and then I will tell you what more he said to me."

When the lamp was brought in, Freda eagerly opened the letter. She perused it two or three times, and then handed it to her companion.

"Read it, Freddie," she said; "I cannot understand it! I cannot believe that he means what he says!"

FREDA, MY BELOVED CHILD:—It is with feelings of unutterable grief that I tell you I must never more look upon your dear face. I am compelled to leave all that is most precious to me, and wander, an exile, to some distant part of the earth. Where that will be I cannot tell you, for I know it not myself. I have resolved to trust the decision to chance, or Providence, by sailing in the very first vessel that leaves England, after my arrival at a certain port. I suffer for no fault, nor even error, of my own. I am crushed down by a burthen that was laid upon me before my birth. My very existence has been a fraud upon others; yet I cannot openly throw off this entanglement of falsity without bringing ruin upon many innocent heads. Honor and honesty alike demand that I should no longer hold a name and property which are not rightfully mine; and by a supposed death all is made clear, and I alone am the sacrifice.

You doubtless remember the case of jewels, which I shall leave, with this letter, in Mrs. Templeman's charge. I have guarded them for you, loyally. They were your mother's, and she designed them for your dowry.

A person calling himself Captain Grainger has laid claim to them, on the grounds that your father left them to him by will. But this cannot be, for they did not belong to your father. Should this man, Grainger, discover your present abode, and renew his efforts to ob-

tain them, I think you had better appeal to the law for protection. Tell Mrs. Templeman all, and she will advise you.

A law-suit might bring some things to light which now are hidden; but whatever you may discover, I trust to your honor to keep in your own breast.

I go forth now a solitary exile, carrying with me from my old life nothing but a clear conscience, and some tender memories of the little girl whom I carried out of the burning house. I take nothing —not even a name; except that I still am, and ever shall be,

Your RUPERT.

Freddie read this aloud, and sat staring at Freda, while a hundred different fancies were working in her brain.

"What do you make of it, dear?" asked Freda, in a tone of despondency.

"Make!" repeated Freddie; "I make so many things of it that my mind is in a perfect confusion. *This* I am sure of, however—you will meet again."

"You are too sanguine, Freddie. *I* feel sure that we have parted for ever. What chance is there that, in this wild, desolate world, we should ever meet again?"

"There are a great many chances," returned Freddie, resolutely. "I told him, for one thing, that I was going to America, and that I would try to persuade you to go with me, if Captain Grainger should trouble you."

Freda's face brightened for a moment, but was as quickly overcast.

"That *first ship* that he talks of may take him to Australia," she said, with a sigh.

"Supposing it should take him to Australia or China, or anywhere else, are there not plenty of other ships, sailing from everywhere else to America?"

"But, Freddie dear, what can you be dreaming about? In such an immense country as America, is it likely, is it *possible*, that he could find out two unknown strangers?"

"I had the presence of mind to confine myself to a State and an occupation," replied Freddie, demurely, for she was conscious that in this instance her conduct had not been wholly disinterested. "I told him I was going to South Carolina, to teach the poor, ignorant black people."

"And *are* you going, Freddie?" demanded Freda, in amazement. "You never mentioned such an idea to me before."

"I have *thought* of it for six months or more," answered Freddie, "but I only decided upon it while your guardian was talking to me. There was no time for reflection, you see, Freda. There was he, just ready to fly off at a tangent, or disappear from the face of the earth like a vapor, and nobody able to say where he was, nor even who he was. Our only chance depended upon my being able, on the instant, to throw out a bait which he might return to after wandering about a while, and coming to his senses. I knew he would never return to England, so I named the place about which I had been thinking."

"I don't desire to pry into his secrets," said Freda,

with her eyes fixed abstractedly upon the letter, "for which reason I will never consent to secure my right to my mother's jewels by appealing to the law, which, he says, might bring to light some circumstances which he has not thought fit to tell me himself. But, O Freddie, my heart sinks when I reflect that all this mystery and misery may arise from his having contracted an uncongenial marriage, as you suggested that evening when first I told you about him."

"Would his own word satisfy you on that point?" inquired Freddie.

"How can you ask such a question? Do you imagine I could doubt his word?"

"Then you may rest satisfied that he is not married, for I asked him the question, point blank, and his answer was, 'No, on my soul, I am not.'"

"You asked him that!" exclaimed Freda. "O Freddie, how could you be so indelicate!"

"There was no indelicacy at all about it," answered Freddie. "I had seen him weep as he listened to your singing; he had as good as told me that he loved you, and his emotion, on tearing himself away without seeing you, was so violent that he staggered in his walk. Now, it just turned upon two questions, whether, in striving to re-unite you, I should be doing a great wrong, or helping to remove one. These two questions were: *was he married,* and *was there insanity in his family?* There was but a moment in which to make up my mind, and to ask them, and I had to *make* that moment

by holding his hand fast. But I *did* ask them, and to both he emphatically answered 'No.' Now, where was the indelicacy, and what harm is there done?"

Freda responded by clasping her friend in her arms and sobbing on her shoulder.

"You acted wisely and kindly, my best Freddie," she whispered, humbly.

"You have not looked into your jewel case yet," suggested Freddie, wishing to divert the conversation; "there may be another letter inside."

"True, there may be," said Freda, wiping away her tears. "Where is the key? Mamma used to keep it tied to the handle."

The strictest search failed to discover it. It was neither attached to the box, nor was it in the envelope of the letter.

"Now, I remember," said Freda, "that I have often seen a key exactly similar to it attached to Rupert's watch chain. No doubt it was the same, but he forgot to give it to you. O Freddie, darling, perhaps he will come back with it!"

"I dare not hope that," said Freddie; "time was evidently very precious with him. Can the lock be easily picked, do you think?"

"That is impossible, for it is one of Chubb's very best; and the box, though it looks so delicate, is exceedingly strong. Mamma showed it to me one day, and explained all about it. How shall we get it open?"

"Don't try," said Freddie, looking quite inspired; "keep it just as it is. He will discover that he still

has the key, and some time or other he will bring it to you. Time will allay the excitement of his feelings; he will take a soberer view of the difficulty, whatever it is, that now interposes between you and him; and he will avail himself of the excuse afforded by the key, to hover about and have a look at you, if nothing more. Then, if once I get hold of him, he wont escape very easily!"

"You are so kind and sympathetic, Freddie," said Freda, smiling affectionately on her energetic friend, "that I really believe you fancy you can become a giantess in my cause. Most fervently do I hope that the course of your love may be smoother than mine."

"I shall never love," replied Freddie, almost sadly; "that is, I must not expect to *be* loved."

"What, *you*, so lovely and lovable as you are!"

"You think you are the only one who has a skeleton locked up in a closet," said Freddie, with a half comical, half sorrowful expression; "but, I assure you, I have an awful one. I have kept it carefully out of sight hitherto; but now, I think I will trot it out for your edification. My skeleton, you must know, is clothed with a horrible set of muscles, as strong as iron. You will promise secresy?"

"Certainly I will," replied Freda, looking slightly alarmed.

"Then, what do you think of this?" And Freddie, starting up, lifted her companion by the waist, and poised her with the utmost ease, first on both hands, and then upon one, at arm's length, above

her head. Then, setting her down, she resumed her own seat with perfect composure.

"It is my misfortune," she said, sadly, "to be stronger than most men."

"But, Freddie," exclaimed Freda, recovering from her amazement, "how did you do it?"

"Just as any other fellow would; but that is nothing to what I can do. This fatal gift is my skeleton. It is of no use to me; and if it were not for the work I do in the garden, it would be a torment to me, for it naturally demands more exercise than a young lady is likely to get in the course of a fashionable education."

"I cannot understand how it can be," said Freda, clasping Freddie's arm; "your arm is round and soft, and your hand is graceful and womanly, yet you lifted me as if I were a doll."

"Which proves that I am a mere lump of deception," replied Freddie, clenching her fist till the muscles of her arm felt like iron; "but, apart from the deceitful appearance, do you suppose any man could love, far less venture to marry a woman who could knock him down, if he offended her; and set his lawful authority at defiance, not by strength of will alone, for that's common enough, but by fair strength of muscle?"

"No true man will love you the less for this wonderful gift, darling Freddie; especially as you make no unfeminine use or exhibition of it."

"Do you think it would be unfeminine to exhibit it—in a public circus, for instance?"

"Oh, dreadful! Don't speak of such a horror!" cried Freda, shrinking, as it were, into herself.

"If that is the light in which you view it," said Freddie, moving to another seat, so as no longer to be in loving contact with her friend, "I must tell you the history of my life. I desire most earnestly that you should go with me to South Carolina; but you must not go in ignorance of what may greatly alter your opinion of me."

"Do you think I am so fickle, Freddie? *Nothing* can alter my opinion of you."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Freddie; and, without further preamble, she related all that had occurred after her flight from Miss Crabtree's tyranny till her arrival at Mrs. Templeman's.

Freda listened in silence. When the narrative was concluded, she exclaimed, "I knew that nothing could lower you in my opinion, Freddie. You are like fine gold, that passes through the fire and comes out even purer than before. I will go with you to America; and, so far from thinking you unfeminine for possessing this beautiful gift of strength, I shall feel happy in knowing that you can protect me from danger."

"And I," said Freddie, sadly, "must be thankful for the strength and the courage which it imparts, and which enable me to be your protector. But, ah, Freda, you cannot imagine how I long and yearn sometimes to enjoy the feeling of being protected! It is so much more womanly. However," she added, rousing herself up and throwing aside her despon-

dency, "it's of no use to lament over what cannot be altered; so, let us talk about business. As we are of one mind about going to America, the only question is, when shall we go?"

"I think it would be well to go before Captain Grainger pays us a visit," said Freda.

"Exactly my idea; and we will not stop to inquire whether it is to avoid Captain Grainger, or to be in the way of meeting with Mr. Rupert. Then, I propose that we begin packing to-morrow, so as to be ready to set off soon after Mrs. Templeman returns. Poor Mrs. Templeman! I shall be sorry to leave her; but if that son of hers comes here, we shall neither of us be able to stay. And now, dear, let us go to bed. It is late already, and we shall have plenty to do to-morrow in preparing for our journey."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUDDEN MOVEMENTS.

THE two girls proceeded cheerfully with their task, the following day; but with so little hurry—for the post had brought no letter from Mrs. Templeman, and they could not leave before she came home—that their operations were not quite completed when the evening mail brought a letter to Freddie that filled them with grief and consternation. It was dated from the house where Mrs. Templeman had been lodging since she was summoned to London by her son's severe attack of sickness; but the writing was not in her hand.

Freddie read it aloud:

MADAM,—Mrs. Templeman desired me to write to you two days ago, to tell you that she was taken very ill; but before I had time to do so she became so much worse that I had not a moment's leisure until now. We called in the best medical advice, and did everything we could for her. I was up with her two nights and never left her all yesterday, but she had one attack after another, getting worse all the time, and died at half-past five this morning.

The doctors say her complaint was spasms of the heart, brought on by grief and trouble; and *I* say it was all caused by the wickedness of her son. If you loved her, Miss Wilson, as from what she said of you I am led to think you did, you will thank Our Merciful

Father for removing her from a world of sorrow, where she has long enjoyed nothing but misery, and had no prospect of anything better for the future.

Mr. Ernest Templeman is that wicked that I could almost have believed he was possessed of a devil; and his dear bosom friend, named Captain Grainger, is almost worse, being old enough to know better, and as ugly as sin, which I could really believe him to be the Evil One himself.

Poor dear Mrs. T. was very anxious about the two young ladies she had left at home, and spoke of you whenever she was at all herself, between the fits of pain. She wished you both to leave the house as soon as possible, so that her son should not find you there when he went down, which was a dreadful thing for a mother to have to say.

I must tell you that his sickness was all a pretence. He was not sick at all when he sent for her. It was just a plot between him and that Captain Grainger to get money out of her, and when he found it would not do, he came blustering here and worried and frightened her into the illness that resulted in her death.

If I can tell you anything more I shall be happy to do so, but I cannot think of anything at present, being quite ill myself with all I have gone through these last few days. I hope you will have plenty of time to get away, for I cannot but suppose he will have the decency to wait till the funeral is over.

I remain, Madam, your obedient servant,

MATILDA WYBROW.

The two friends looked at each other for a few moments, unable to speak for the conflict of emotions that rushed through their minds. Then Freddie, starting up, crushed the letter into her pocket, and said, in a low, steady voice: "Finish your packing quickly, Freda. I'll take the trunks through the kitchen garden to the door that opens on the lane. They'll be safe there, as the garden is always locked, and I have the keys. *He'll* not stop for his mother's

funeral. We shall have him here to-night. I am sure of it."

"*You* take down these heavy trunks, Freddie? How is that possible? Oh, let us leave them, and go! For heaven's sake, let us go!"

"I'll *not* leave them," replied Freddie; "you can lock the door while I am gone, and open it to no one but me. I will not abandon you, even if they should come while I am away. Only, *don't* be afraid. They shall not harm you, and I have my revolver in case of the worst. I am most anxious about our luggage."

She lifted the heaviest trunk as she spoke, and placed it on her shoulder.

"I hope the servants are out of the way," she observed; "but I must risk it."

In a short time she returned, triumphant. The servants were at tea in the kitchen. Another and another of the trunks was safely deposited behind some bushes in the garden, near an outer door which was used only by the gardener, until all were safe, and Freddie was springing up the stairs with a light step and a light heart, when on the landing she found herself face to face with Ernest Templeman.

With a haughty inclination of the head she attempted to pass him; but he rudely interposed himself in her way.

"So, I've found you at last, Miss Wilson, have I?" he began. "I've been banging at your door for half an hour. Where's the other girl? I want to see her.

I've brought an admirer of hers to visit her. He's a gentleman who is ready to follow her round the world, for love of *les beaux yeux de la cassette*. Ha! ha!"

He was evidently intoxicated, and his appearance and manner were as offensive as his speech.

"Is your mother buried yet, Mr. Templeman?" asked Freddie, with severe dignity, hoping to recall him to some sense of decency by the mention of his mother's name.

"I don't care a curse whether she is or not," he replied with brutal bravado; "I'd rather go to a young lady's wedding than an old woman's funeral any time, especially if the wedding is my own, too. My friend Grainger says that marriage is an infernal bore. He tried it once, and didn't like it; but I'm going to do as I like, and not as he likes, so that's settled. And I'm going to marry you to-morrow, my little beauty. And you shall have this house to live in and carry on the school, and we'll be as jolly as sand-boys!"

"Will you cease this offensive language, sir, and let me pass?" said Freddie, in a low measured tone, while her eyes grew dark and flashed ominously beneath her knitted brows.

"My bride shall give me a kiss before she goes, and then I don't think I can part with her at all to-night—" said the brute, advancing with a horrible leer on his face, and his arms outstretched to embrace her.

There was no struggle, no scuffle; but in another

instant Ernest Templeman lay writhing and groaning at the bottom of the well formed by the winding stairs.

"Open the door, Freda!" whispered Freddie. "I am here. It is all right."

"O Freddie, I am so glad you are come!" cried Freda, opening the door with difficulty, she was in such a violent tremble. "What is amiss? you are so pale! What has happened? Where is that dreadful man who came here and threatened to burst the door open? Why don't you speak?"

Freddie was indeed very pale. She felt sick at heart at the possibility of having taken a human life, even in self-defence.

"It was Ernest Templeman who came to the door, Freda," she replied. "I met him on the stairs; he insulted me, and I threw him over. Perhaps I have killed him! It is an awful thing to think of. Hark, there's a commotion down stairs! They have found him, and are taking him away somewhere. I'll go out and listen. God grant he may not be dead!"

"Don't open the door, Freddie; some one will get in!" cried Freda, in the wildest terror.

"No one shall harm you, dear. No one shall come near you," said Freddie; "but I *must* know what harm is done."

As she opened the door, the housemaid came running up stairs.

"O Miss Wilson!" she began, "such a dreadful thing has happened! Mr. Ernest has come home,

and he was quite drunk, and he tumbled down the stairs, and his leg is broken, and his head is cut dreadful! And Sally and another man he brought with him have carried him into Missis's parlor, and there he is laying on the sophy, groaning like anything."

"Who is the man who came with him?" inquired Freddie.

"I don't know, miss; but he's the most heejus creatur I ever set eyes upon."

"You had better go back and see what you can do to help. And whatever happens, don't come to us about it. I shall lock our room door, and will not open it again to-night for anything. I don't like to have strange men about the house."

The girl heard the resolute click of the lock as she turned away.

"Now, take your hat and cloak," said Freddie, "and we'll escape down the back stairs while they are all busy in the parlor. I'll reconnoitre first, and come for you if the way is clear."

As the two fugitives glided down the back stairs, the sound of voices was audible from the parlor, mingled with groans and execrations from Ernest Templeman. All Freddie's compunctious feelings vanished as she heard him. He was not killed, and a broken leg was no more than he richly merited; so she did not regret having hurled him over the banisters.

They reached the garden unobserved, and locked the door on the inside. Here Freddie also deposited

the key of their bedroom, which she had brought with her. Crossing to the opposite side of the large garden, where a high wall separated it from an unfrequented lane, they found their luggage safe where Freddie had placed it.

A slight difficulty here arose. Freda would not consent to be left alone while Freddie ran to the station for a carriage to transport their trunks, and the latter doubted her ability to keep up with her own rapid steps.

"I'll run; I'll fly, rather than be left alone for one minute, Freddie! That dreadful Captain Grainger would come out and find me, while you were gone. I'm sure he would. I shall die of fright if you leave me!"

Though Freddie was inclined to ridicule such an excess of timidity, which was wholly incomprehensible to her large, strong spirit, she felt too much compassion for her weak friend to desert her even momentarily, though the delay might cause them to miss the train. With a brief "Come along, then," she seized Freda's hand and hurried her along at a rate which soon brought her, panting and exhausted, to the station.

All was now plain sailing. By Freddie's forethought and excellent arrangement, in removing the trunks betimes into the garden, they were carried away unknown to any one in the house; and while the estimable Captain Grainger was keeping a sharp watch upon their empty room, lest they should attempt to escape and carry off Winifred's Jewels,

the two fugitives were comfortably settled in a quiet hotel in Liverpool, discussing the events of the day, and shedding many sympathetic tears over the sad fate of their kind preceptress, which they had hitherto had no leisure even to think of.

They had also their future plans to arrange. By consulting the papers, they found that a Cunard steamer would sail the following day; and on this they decided to depart.

A few hours of the morning were occupied by a visit to Chester, where Freddie drew from the bank a sum sufficient for their voyage, and made arrangements for the transmission of the balance of her money to New York. They had agreed that Freda should repay her when her jewels were sold; for—though she knew not that Captain Grainger's rapacity was the cause of it—she had not been so liberally supplied with ready money as her guardian desired.

The afternoon saw them steaming down the Mersey. In the evening they were out on the Atlantic, Freda looking rather pale; but the irrepressible Freddie, ruddy with the invigorating sea breeze, *awfully hungry*, and alternately singing "Farewell! Farewell, my native shore!" and talking Tapleyan philosophy for the encouragement of her companion, who, at every bound which the noble ship took over the long rolling waves, felt less and less disposed to be "jolly under the circumstances."

When within a day's sail of New York, Freda

asked the name of a large steamer which was pursuing the same course as themselves.

"That's the 'Aurora,' from Southampton to New York, miss," was the reply.

Alas, that no aerial telegraph could communicate between two loving hearts that were "so near, and yet so far!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

GILBERT BRACEBRIDGE went at once to California, without lingering in New York, or any of the cities along his route. His last dollar was gone by the time his journey was accomplished; but he was too much of an American to be long without money while he had hands to work with.

"I want a dinner," he said to the master of the first large hotel he came up to, "but I have no money to pay for it. Can you give me a job of work?"

"What can you do?"

"Well—I can do most anything," replied Gilbert, affecting a slight drawl and a Yankee mode of speech, which he suspected would secure him better treatment and greater freedom from imposition than would be accorded to him as an Englishman—"carpentering, blacksmithing, plowing. What have you got to do?"

"Can you chop wood?"

"Got a sharp axe handy?" said Gilbert; and without waiting for an answer he walked off to the wood-pile, which he saw at the side of the

house, and soon made the walls ring to his lusty strokes. That was how he earned his first meal in California.

Finding that labor was scarce and well paid for, he continued working at San Francisco for some months, during which time he acquired a large amount of information respecting the gold fields, from the miners who came back to sell their gold, and indulge in the brutish dissipation of the city. He profited by the knowledge thus gained, and instead of purchasing a claim and becoming a miner, he invested his savings in a horse and wagon, which he loaded with provisions and such things as he learned were most needed in the camps, and became a trader. He found this more profitable than digging would have been, unless he had proved to be one of the favored few who find nuggets wherever they look for them. But those chances were as one in a thousand; whereas the trade he had embarked in was a certainty, if well conducted. He made several trips with steadily increasing success, as he comprehended better the wants of his customers, and enlarged his means of supplying them. On his return to "Frisco" he invariably boarded with his first employer and friend, the hotel keeper.

The warm season was far advanced, or, to speak more correctly, the *hot* season, for it is a trifle more than warm when the thermometer stands at 99°, and Gilbert meditated taking a journey to New York, for the sole purpose of ascertaining whether an

English lady, named Winifred, had applied at the Freedmen's Bureau, to be sent as a school teacher to South Carolina.

Strenuously did he argue with himself against the folly of taking so long a journey with so vague an object. The more Common Sense tried to prove that it was utterly absurd and Quixotic, the more had Love to say in its favor.

Was it at all likely that she would come to America?

Nay, had she not said she would come, and did she look like a girl who would change her mind?

Supposing she came to this country, it was highly improbable that she would waste her talents on a negro school.

On the contrary, nothing was more probable. She had said she would apply to the Bureau for a school, and that was equivalent to being appointed to one, of course; for would they not be delighted to secure such a splendid creature for the work?

Gilbert Bracebridge, you were never accused of being a consummate coxcomb; but do you not prove yourself to be one, when you suppose that a few remarks made by you, could have the power to induce a high-minded girl like Winifred to take so important a step?

The answer came not in words, but in a thrilling recollection of the tearful eyes that met his when he bade her farewell.

Tush! She was crying over the sick baby. (Common Sense was getting *riled.*)

But Love remembers distinctly that her eyes were quite dry when she raised them to his; so *that* objection wont pass muster.

The idea of going to New York on this wild-goose chase first entered his mind while he was at the diggings, disposing of his last load of goods. It had been working in his brain ever since; and over and over again had he discussed the question with himself, somewhat in the form given above; raising objections, dictated by common sense, only to overthrow them by refutations prompted by the uncontrollable passion with which that short interview with Freddie had inspired him.

He had never been in love before—had not even imagined himself in that predicament; yet he could not mistake the nature of the emotion which overcame him at the instant when his eyes first rested on her glowing face, as she passed him on the common. Had he seen no more of her than that, he would have felt that a void was left in his existence; but having conversed with her, witnessed her active benevolence, pressed her hand, and seen the tears rush into her eyes under the influence of his own sad gaze,—to see her no more after all this, was to have the best half of his being annihilated. Nothing that earth could give besides, would compensate for her absence.

Time, instead of weakening this feeling, only increased its intensity. The contemplated journey in search of her occupied all his thoughts as he travelled back to San Francisco, and the "heathen Chinee"

whom he employed to drive the large wagon which his extended business required, was sorely puzzled to account for the change in his employer's demeanor.

Arrived at San Francisco, he dismissed his heathen, and actually talked trade with a man who wanted to buy his wagon and horses. It was *only* talk, of course; but when he went to bed he knew very well that he could get a good price for them in the morning, before the train started for the East.

And still the *pros* and *cons* played leap-frog in his brain, and kept him awake half the night.

His sleeplessness was farther increased by an occasional groan proceeding from an adjoining room, which was separated from his, only by a thin wooden partition. He had heard, casually, that there was a sick man in the house, a miner who had recently returned from the diggings; but as he had probably, like the generality of his fraternity, incurred his sufferings by his own misconduct, Gilbert had felt no particular interest in him. But Gilbert's heart was too gentle to allow him to listen unmoved to the moans of a fellow creature in evident pain; and with a resolve to "look after the poor devil" in the morning, he at length fell asleep.

As will naturally be supposed, his dreams were all about Freddie. Once more he was carrying poor Kitty through the storm; but instead of lying silent and insensible, she uttered repeated groans, and at last, in a tone of agony, she cried out, "Winifred! Winifred!" so loud, that he suddenly awoke.

He started up and listened. He was quite posi-

tive that he had heard the name spoken, and in the voice of a man. That there could be more than one Winifred in the world was out of the question; therefore, whoever the man might be whose cry had aroused him from his sleep, he must be acquainted, and probably in love with *his* Winifred.

As he sat listening for a repetition of the sounds, with his eyes glaring round upon the darkness, he was very much alive to the fact that he had a bowie knife and a revolver within reach.

The sick man moaned and tossed in his bed. Then a faint, weary voice fell upon the listener's ear:

"O Winifred," it said, "I am dying; dying of thirst in this pitiless desert! Must I never see you again? Will you not come to me when I am dying?"

There was something familiar in the tone of the voice. The sweat stood thick on Gilbert's brow as he sprang out of bed and hurried on his clothes.

He knew the house well enough to get what he wanted without disturbing any one; and having obtained a light, he went to the room where the sick man lay.

Several other men occupied the apartment, but they were all buried in heavy slumber, as their deep breathing testified. The sick man was easily distinguished from these by his restless movements and the low moans which he uttered from time to time.

Gilbert held the light so that it fell upon his face.

"'Tis he," he muttered; "I cannot be mistaken in that face which I know so well! But, what mystery can there be behind all this? Or, did I dream that I read an account of his death? Yet, even if so, why is he here, in this forlorn condition? Be that as it may, I will take care of him. And, first of all, I must get him out of this stye. Faugh! The smell of rum and tobacco is enough to poison him."

He raised the invalid in his strong arms and bore him to his own bed. The room was small, but it was clean and well ventilated, and Rupert Forester (for he it was) would have a better chance of recovery there than in the larger room from which he had been removed, where the atmosphere was tainted by the foul breaths and unwholesome exhalations from the spirit-clogged lungs and unwashed bodies of the drunken diggers.

All the rest of the night Gilbert sat by the bed, now bathing the feverish hands and face with fresh water, now pouring a teaspoonful into the parched mouth, and always revolving the same questions in his mind: "What can have brought him to this plight? and, what can he know about Winifred?"

With the first blush of morning he sought the landlord, told him he had discovered a friend in the poor sick miner, and consulted what was best to be done.

The result was, that they sent for a doctor, who pronounced the case to be typhus fever, and prescribed pills and potions, which were duly adminis-

tered, with the usual effect of still further weakening the already enfeebled frame.

A week, two weeks, three weeks passed away, and brought no improvement. The strong man tended his friend with the thoughtful care of a woman, and scarcely ever left him. On one of these rare occasions, while Rupert slept, watched by the landlord's daughter, Gilbert visited a place where the English *Times* was filed, and eagerly consulted the numbers issued two or three months previously. There it was. "Fearful catastrophe at Brighton. A Nobleman drowned while bathing." Then followed all the particulars; so he was satisfied that he had not been dreaming. The solution of the mystery was as far off as ever.

A few nights later, as he lay on the floor sleeping "with one eye open," he was aroused by hearing his patient trying to get out of bed, and talking hurriedly.

"Mother, mother!" he cried, "why have you suffered me to grow up a living lie upon the face of God's earth? You had better have strangled me in infancy. I will not, I cannot hold a title and estates to which I have no right. I care not though your reputation may suffer. You should have thought of that before. I will do justice to the rightful heir, and the world must find what excuse it can for you, in the wretched marriage into which you were forced. Ah, yes—you say truly—my sisters are innocent. They would be ruined. Their husbands married them as Earl's daughters, and such an Earl! For

their sakes I will be silent. I will be a faithful steward of the estates till young Clarence comes of age; and then,—I hardly know what then, but he shall have his own, even at the cost of my life. Thank God, I was never married!"

Rupert was so restless all this time, and made so many attempts to get out of bed, that Gilbert was compelled to hold him, and consequently to hear all that he said.

This, then, was the secret which the Countess confided to her son upon her death-bed.

"She had better have held her tongue about it," thought Gilbert.

Another train of ideas soon possessed the sick man's brain.

"Poor Ellen! To die such a death! Struck down by her own husband! God of heaven, can a man be such a brute as to burn his own child! The key—he has it with him. I must have the key to let her out! Ah, I did not mean to kill him when I fired! He threatened me; I fired in self-defence. Ellen! I have rescued your child, and here are your jewels. Kind Mother Superior, is she dying? No; I'll not see her till the last moment. Yes, Ellen, I promise it; I will protect your child!"

There was another pause, and the patient seemed to have fallen into an uneasy sleep.

Unconscious that he was thinking aloud, though, in fact, the words were not more than breathed, Gilbert whispered: "But where did he see Winifred?"

The name, faintly uttered as it was, acted like magic on Rupert's excited imagination.

"Winifred! My Freda! My only love!" he cried, "shall I never more look upon thy sweet face? Oh, it is so cruel, when I know, too, that she loves me! But I'll place her in safety. That school near Chester is the very thing. He will not think of looking for her there. She will be safe when I am no longer able to protect her. I will not bid her farewell—I cannot—my strength would fail me!"

Winifred in a school near Chester! Was any further proof needed? It was for this that she wished to come to America. To follow and reclaim her wandering lover!

And Gilbert, as he sat like a statue by the bed, glaring with hot fierce eyes upon its helpless occupant, *felt*, rather than thought, that he had but to leave his rival to his fate, and he would die.

He was roused by the touch of Rupert's feverish hand, so thin and wasted. He rushed out of the house.

Was he, then, determined to leave the wretched man to die? No; he went no farther than to the fresh cold spring, from which he brought a pail of pure water. The patient drank eagerly. Then the nurse bathed his face and hands, and stood watching him.

"God forgive me for my evil thoughts!" he said, in a deep whisper; "I will save him, if I can, for the love I bear him,—the love of old times, when he was as a brother to me,—and I will save him

for Winifred's sake. He may return even yet, and make her a Countess. For Winifred's sake, my brother!"

He pressed his lips to Rupert's brow as a pledge of faith.

"Something more must be done for him," he continued; "these drugs do him no good. He is more soothed by a little cold water than by all the doctor's physic. I'll pack him in a wet sheet, and throw the medicine out of window."

With Gilbert, to resolve was to act. I need not describe the process by which he treated his friend, but it is necessary to mention that, just before the patient fell into the delightful sleep which usually accompanies the treatment, he spoke again.

"Gilbert!" he exclaimed. "I thought Gilbert was here. If I could find Gilbert, all would be well. He would take care of my Winifred—his sister's child."

For a moment Gilbert stood moveless as a statue. Then he dropped on his knees beside the bed, and bowed his face upon his hands.

The terrible convulsion that shook his soul while he remained thus was hidden from sight, but its effect was visible on his countenance when he arose.

He seemed like one who had stood face to face with something more terrible than death, and who must carry the ever-present recollection of the horror with him to his grave.

His face was deadly pale beneath its bronze, and the bright cheery glance had passed from his eyes, never, perhaps, to return.

Winifred was his niece!

He would go to New York; he would track her wherever she was gone; with his own eyes, he would see that she was really the same Winifred he had once seen near Chester; he would re-unite these severed lovers, and then go to the other end of the earth, he cared not whither.

Rupert already slept the calm, untroubled sleep that promised speedy recovery.

As soon as he could be safely left, Gilbert would depart.

CHAPTER XX.

LIFE IN THE SOUTH.

"DRIVE!" exclaimed Freddie, "I should think I could, indeed. I'll drive eight in hand if you'll give me a good team. But, seriously, Freda, we must have some means of getting across that creek before a heavy rain falls. Even as it is, you see, it wont do for me to carry you across that old log every day. We should certainly be seen sooner or later, and a pretty thing that would be!"

"Why are you so ashamed of this glorious gift of strength, Freddie? I should be so proud of it, if it were mine, and you hide it as though it were a crime to possess it."

"It is worse than a crime," replied Freddie; "it's a blunder. But that wont help us across a swollen creek. Will you walk with me to that Mr. Roy's, and see if he will hire his horse and buggy to us till we can buy a couple of horses?"

"Why, Freddie, is not that the man who has treated the poor black people so cruelly?—who is even suspected of having killed some of them?" asked Freda.

"Yes, dear; but I never heard that his horse has done them any harm; and, as the man himself is sick and confined to his bed, he is the more likely to lend it."

"I'll go with you, if you think we can do so safely. But, suppose we should meet some of those men who have been threatening to shoot us, and to burn the school house, and so many dreadful things besides? Had we not better send a note, or a message?"

"There is a path through the woods, which has been pointed out to me," answered Freddie, "where we are very unlikely to encounter any unpleasant characters. And, besides, I always carry this little friend," producing her revolver from a carefully concealed pocket. "There are six men's lives here, Freda; for I never miss my aim, and it is not probable that we should meet with more than two or three at once. And perhaps they might be satisfied with being knocked down. O Freda, would it not be jolly if a couple of bush-whackers were to come swaggering up to us poor unprotected females, threatening to cow-hide us if we did not get back to the North, and then to find to their cost that one of the gentle creatures could hit out straight from the shoulder, and knock them into the middle of next week!"

"O Freddie, dear!" cried Freda in dismay, "what makes you use such dreadful slang expressions?"

"It's just the force of old associations," replied

Freddie, laughing. "The celebrated pugilist who had the honor of instructing me in his noble art, was also a proficient in the elegant accomplishment of talking slang, and I learned the two with equal facility. Thus it happens that one always suggests the other. Now, if you feel that you will be safe with me, put on your hat and let us be gone. We shall probably return in old Roy's buggy."

Their walk was a pleasant one, along a well-defined path through a tract of woodland that was probably a portion of the original forest. The trees were beautiful, though not remarkable for size, and the wood was quite destitute of the luxuriant shrubby undergrowth, which is so marked a feature in most English woods.

The air was delightful, for though excessively warm, it was so dry that the effect was quite exhilarating.

The house to which they were going was one of a class that is often met with in South Carolina. It was a frame building, containing four rooms, all on the same floor, and raised upon brick piers about three or four feet from the ground. A wide entry clear through from front to back, formed almost another room, being by far the coolest and pleasantest part of the house during the heat of summer. The two front rooms were provided with fire-places, but there were none in the back rooms, which were also of a lower pitch, owing to the slope of the roof.

Mr. Roy was a widower, without children, so the young ladies saw only colored people when they

arrived. A great number of these were standing about in the yard behind the house, and hanging round the doors of the wretched log cabins where the servants lived. They made very little noise, yet it was evident from their excited looks and eager whisperings that something was taking place which possessed an unusual amount of interest for them.

An elderly woman came out to receive them with the form of salutation most usual among the black women, shaking hands, and performing a sort of courtesy by bending both knees, and, as it were, presenting her stomach to the visitors.

"Glad to see you, ladies," she said; "how is bofe your helfs?"

"We are quite well, thank you," replied Freddie. "How is Mr. Roy?"

"He's mighty bad, Miss Winifred, mighty bad. I thought for sure de Lord had done took him last night."

"How is your helf, Miss Winifred?" inquired an old man, joining in the conversation. "How is your helf, Miss Fredy? Thank you, miss, quite well, bress de Lord!—Mas'r Dick has been very bad, ladies, but I don't tink he'll die dis time. De Lord is doing a great work upon him."

"What do you mean, uncle Benjamin?" inquired Freda.

"He's been mighty hard upon us poor black folks, specially since freedom, and now de merciful Lord have sent all dose poor cullud men what he's done killed, and dey are round his bed, ebery one

of 'em, and Mas'r Dick is talking to 'em quite sensible, and telling 'em he couldn't help killing dem, cos he was made to do it, and he asks deir pardons and calls upon de name ob de Lord."

"He is delirious,—out of his head, you know," said Freddie, "and *thinks* he sees them, that's all. His conscience wont let him rest."

"No, honey, no!" insisted the woman, "he's as sensible as I am. Just listen to him."

In fact they heard, in the silence that ensued, the voice of a man speaking on the other side of the wooden partition, in a tone of earnest entreaty, but with no sound of raving or delirium.

"I was not my own master," he said, "and I could not help doing what I did. I was compelled to it by those who were more powerful than I was. Don't come and reproach me while I am lying here helpless. I will never harm nor wrong any of your people again if you will only go away and leave me in peace."

"Bress de Lord!" murmured uncle Benjamin.

"His voice sounds as if he were in his senses," observed Freddie. "We came to see if he would hire out his buggy to us for a few weeks. Do you think you could ask him?"

"Lord knows!" replied the woman. "Look'ee here, honey, he's been mightily set against you two ladies for coming here to teach us poor folks,—I don't know what he'll say."

"Give him our message, any way," said Freddie, "that can't kill him, and he can't kill us."

The woman still hesitated, when Mr. Roy called to her, to know what strangers were there.

"It's the two school teachers, Mas'r Dick," she answered, "wanting to know if you'll hire out your buggy and horse for a week or two, for them to drive to school in."

"Yes, yes—let them have it,—let them have it."

"What is the hire? I will pay it now, if agreeable," said Freddie, who had heard what he said.

"Nothing—nothing—they're welcome to it. And now will you leave me in peace?" The last question was addressed to the spirits of his victims whom he believed to be standing around him. "Tell Dave to clean the buggy, and hitch up Brown Bob for those ladies. Tell them they are welcome to it. Give me a drink, aunt Becky. Oh, thank God! Some of them are going!"

"Ah! now don't you see how wonnerful de Lord is working on his sinful heart?" said uncle Benjamin, "bress de name ob de Lord!"

"It is a fortunate delusion for us," said Freddie, "and I hope, for the sake of your people, that it will last after he gets well."

The buggy was soon ready, and Brown Bob,—the best horse in the penitent sinner's stable,—took them in fine style to their temporary home.

It would have been impossible for them to attend the school on several occasions after the heavy thunder storms that visited the neighborhood about once a week, if they had not had the means of crossing the swollen creek.

One afternoon a storm of unusual severity burst over the school-house, and detained them more than an hour after the usual time of closing. Several of the children lived, like themselves, on the further side of the creek, and these the teachers promised to take across in the buggy.

Freddie drove slowly down to the creek, followed by the merry little troop, laughing, shouting, singing, and performing all sorts of antics. The water was higher than they had ever seen it before, and even Freddie was doubtful whether it would be safe to attempt to cross over till it had subsided to a safe level. Had she been alone she would probably have dashed through and risked it; but Freda's timidity, as well as her safety had to be consulted, and she agreed to wait, unless Brown Bob, when driven gently to the edge, should take the ford of his own free will.

But Bob put his head down to the water, and suddenly backed, snorting and showing the strongest signs of terror and repugnance.

"What's that in the water?" exclaimed Freda. "Surely it's a man! I see his arm! Charley! Harry!" she called, to two of the biggest boys, who were in fact almost young men. "There's a man in the water! Make haste and get him out!"

The lads sprang forward, caught the arm which she had seen, and drew to the bank a loathsome and ghastly object. It was the body of a negro, which had evidently been a long time in the water. The hands and feet were bound with ropes, and

round the neck was fastened a heavy stone, tied up in the end of a sack.

The girls screamed and huddled together, shrinking with horror from the dreadful thing, yet impelled by curiosity to approach and examine it. The boys looked on in wonder and dread, and the word "bush-whacker" was whispered among them, as they tried to guess at the identity of the unfortunate person, and the cause of his death. Freda was silent, and Freddie's attention was taken up for the moment in pacifying Bob, who tried hard to break away.

"Don't go near it, children," she said, in a steady voice, calculated to reassure them; "the poor man has been dead a long time, and you can do him no good, and you may take some harm yourselves. I am going to fetch some men to take charge of the body, and when I return I will take you over the creek, as I promised. We shall not be gone long."

"Stay, Freddie," whispered Freda, "let me get out. It would not be right to leave these poor children with no one to sustain their courage and control their fears. I will remain with them." Then glancing round to see that none of the children were within hearing, she added, "I saw two more corpses in the water! Bring the men quickly. I will show them where they are, but it is better to conceal this fresh horror from the children."

"I knew there was true metal in you, Freda, should the occasion arise to try it, and I see I was right. Blood tells, they say."

Nevertheless Freddie did not like to leave her friend unprotected in that desolate spot, and Brown Bob had to put forth his best paces to keep up with her demands.

The place to which she was driving was a small collection of huts, where she would probably find several men driven home by the storm. As she approached she saw six or seven horsemen riding quickly away in the opposite direction. From their general appearance she judged that they were white men, and felt glad that she was spared the annoyance of meeting them.

When she drove up she found the black population in a great commotion. Many of the women were weeping bitterly. One was addressing a small knot of listeners with the most violent tones and gesticulations; the old men seemed bowed down by despondency, and the younger were all more or less exasperated. All were, of course, talking at the same time, or they would not have been genuine Africans.

"If I'd been here I'd have had a shot at them!" exclaimed one young fellow.

"You are too venturesome, Tom Hacket," responded an old man, "you'd only get served worse yourself if you tried to stop them in their deviltries. The Lord help us poor black people! We shall all go back to slavery again!"

"Here comes Miss Winifred! Let's hear what she says about it!" said another.

"What is amiss, my friends?" asked Freddie, as

she stopped in the midst of them. "What has happened to make all this disturbance? No fighting, I hope?"

"No, no, Miss Winifred," replied the young man on whom her eye fell as she spoke, "I'se done quit fightin'. But I'd ha' fit if I'd ha' bin here dis evenin', though, fore I'd ha' let my poor ole mother be whipped!"

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked Freddie, with growing impatience, "I beg of you to tell me."

A dozen voices answered, and from the consequent confusion she at last gathered that the men she had seen riding away, had come to the cabins, pulled out the women, who tried to hide themselves, and flogged them severely.

She learned, furthermore, that this was not by any means the first time that these *gentlemen*, the much boasted Southern chivalry (!!), had performed the same dastardly outrage, and that for no fault the poor creatures had committed, but, as they expressed it, for mere devilment.

"And do you call yourselves men," exclaimed Freddie, indignantly, "and would stand by and see your women treated so shamefully? Go back to slavery, do you say? You deserve it, for your cowardice!"

"Why, Miss Winifred, what could we poor creeturs do?" said the old man who had spoken first.

"Show them that you are no longer slaves, but free men, with the same rights as themselves," she

replied. "Some of you have guns; could you not shoot the ruffians? What! Had you no cudgels—no knives—no fists, even, to knock them down?"

"They didn't whip *me!*" cried the woman who had been talking when Freddie arrived.

"No," echoed the old man, "they didn't whip aunt Caroline; she fit them manfully."

"Did they give you that bad cut on your face, aunt Caroline?" asked Freddie, observing that blood was flowing from a wound on her cheek.

"Yes, Miss Winifred; it was little Joe Atkins threw a rock at me. But I don't mind; I gave them as good as they gave me."

"If you will all follow aunt Caroline's example, these white rascals will soon learn to respect you. But now, I want some of you men to come down to the creek. There's a dead man that our boys have pulled out of the water, and from the appearance I am convinced he must have been murdered."

A loud wail arose from the women as they heard this. But one of them demanded, "Is it a black man, Miss Winifred?"

"I am sorry to say it is. Come quickly, for Miss Trevanian is there with the school children, and if any of these white *gentlemen* should go by, they would probably annoy and insult her."

The whole colony started off in a moment. The men forgot the shame which had overpowered them under Freddie's reproaches; the women forgot their wrongs and their bruises, and all hurried away at a pace which kept Bob at a gentle trot.

When they arrived within a few hundred yards of the creek, they all stopped with one accord, with raised hands and open eyes and mouths, listening to such music as they had never before heard. Sweet, rich and powerful rose Freda's lovely voice, blended with the fine, though uncultivated tones of the negro children. She had assembled them on the driest spot she could find, and, to withdraw their young minds as much as possible from the horrible sight they had been looking at, she had engaged them in singing a beautiful and solemn hymn which she had taught them.

"Sure nuff de angels can't sing no better'n dat!" cried one old woman, while tears of delight dropped from her raised eyes, and her withered countenance assumed an expression of perfect beatitude.

But Freda saw them; the hymn ceased, and these impressionable children of the sun returned to the terrible reality of life.

Loud cries and wailings arose when they recognized the corpse as that of a man who had disappeared a few weeks previously. Freda pointed out the places where she believed she had seen two other corpses. Some of the men waded into the water and brought them out. They were a man and a woman, unknown, but as evidently murdered, for heavy weights were tied to their necks.

While they stood in consultation about the means of moving the remains to the burial ground, they were joined by another man in a state of the wildest excitement, who told them that the dam of a mill,

situated about half a mile higher up the creek, had given way before the accumulation of water, and upwards of twenty bodies, all bound and weighted like these three, had been washed out into the stream.

The dreaded name of Ku-Klux had not then attained the notoriety which distinguished it a few years later, but the outrages on defenceless women, and the wholesale murders described above, were some of the earlier works of that band of miscreants.

CHAPTER XXI.

HORSE DEALING.

For several days the fearful sight of those poor murdered people seemed to be ever-present to the young school teachers, and oppressed their spirits like a night-mare. Even Freddie was sobered down, and could no longer extract amusement from the eccentricities of their landlady, which had been an unfailing source of delight to her ever since they had taken up their abode in her house. Miss Fanny Kitely was indeed a most remarkable female, both in appearance and character. She was an elderly spinster; excessively tall, and with about as much variety of contour in her ungainly figure as is observable in a pair of tongs. Her features were sharp and pinched, and her disposition was to the full as angular as her body. At times she professed to be extremely religious, but her boarders soon discovered that her piety was of the intermittent type, and only came on violently on the occurrence of a camp-meeting or other sectarian jollification, when an abundance of the good things of this world would be obtainable, in addition to the means of grace. On ordinary occasions, the chief points of her theology

were a firm belief that at the day of judgment she would take a flight up into the air, and a positive conviction that God made "them niggers" to be the slaves of the white race. When questioned regarding the grounds on which she based the latter assertion, her reply was, "Why, of course, it stands to reason. What did God make them black for, if he didn't mean them to be slaves?"

Her education was on a par with that usually to be found among the "poor whites," as they are sometimes called (otherwise *white trash*); that is to say, she was very little in advance of the generality of the freedmen, and more ignorant than some of the school children.

She had been much out of humor since the disclosure of systematic murder made by the breaking down of the mill-dam, for that was a stubborn fact which could neither be denied nor palliated. She had at first attempted to treat it lightly, saying, "I reckon they'd done something to deserve it," but was silenced by such an eloquent burst of indignation from Freda, that Freddie listened in silent astonishment.

Miss Fanny liked the money that the young ladies paid her, though she hated, like poison, the work on which they were engaged. "What's the good of teaching them niggers," she would say, "you can't never learn them nothing!" And when assured that they were as apt and intelligent scholars as any white children, she retreated within an inner fortification, which time alone could de-

stroy, and comforted herself by saying that they would never remember anything they had learned, nor have sense to do any good with it.

As she hated their work and scorned the negroes, she was excessively *riled* when Mr. Roy lent them his buggy. Gall and wormwood were as milk and honey compared with her feelings when she contemplated "them nigger teachers driving to school, while *she* had to go on foot."

It was, therefore, with great satisfaction that she informed them about a week afterwards that Dick Roy had sent to say he wanted his buggy.

"I am afraid," said Freda, "from the wording of that message, that Mr. Roy is returning to his old sentiments of animosity towards niggers and nigger teachers."

"Ay," replied Freddie,

> 'When the Devil was sick, the Devil a monk would be;
> When the Devil was well, the Devil a monk was he.'

That may be the case with our friend; but I suspect the fair Kitely curtailed the message somewhat of its fair proportions. Miss Kitely," she added, going to the door, "who brought the message from Mr. Roy?"

"It was Joe Hacket."

"Is he waiting for an answer?"

"I reckon," was the concise reply.

"Will you tell him to come in, if you please?" said Freddie.

"Ho! Joe!" shouted Miss Fanny. But how

can I give in writing any idea of the way in which they call any one in South Carolina? At first the two syllables were pretty equally emphasized; but as the summons was repeated the Ho became lengthened out, and the Joe diminished, the vowel sound being also altered from *o* to *a*, until the result was "Ha————w Jaw!"

Miss Fanny's voice was more remarkable for power and shrillness than for sweetness, but the young ladies were pretty well used to its strident tones by this time, and the Haw Jaw passed without comment.

The summons was answered by a good-natured looking black lad, who showed all his white teeth in a friendly grin as he entered the presence of the teachers.

"So you've come for Mr. Roy's buggy, have you, Joe?" said Freddie.

"Yes, Miss Winifred," replied Joe; "Mas'r Dick wants it to ride in it next week."

"What message did he send, Joe? Tell us exactly what he told you to say," said Freda.

"He say to give his expects to bofe you ladies, and say he be glad if you be convenient to let him have de buggy de fust of de week, cos he better now, and want to go to Gusty." (Augusta.)

"Well! Isn't that what I said?" bawled Miss Fanny, from the entry where she had been listening. "Did you think I'd told you a lie, Miss Winifred?"

"Oh, no!" replied Freddie, with perfect good temper; "you did not tell an untruth, Miss Fanny;

but by leaving out a part of it, you turned a polite message into a rude one."

"I told you the man wanted his buggy, and that's about the long and short of it, I reckon."

Joe was dismissed with his message, and presently Miss Fanny poked her white face and sharp nose in at the window, saying, with a malicious chuckle, "If you want horses, you'd better look out. There's a string of 'em gwine down the road."

Freddie was out in a moment, closely followed by Miss Fanny, and at a greater distance by Freda. She stopped the man who was driving the horses, saying she wanted to purchase one, and would like to see if he had anything that would suit her.

"Certainly, madam," he replied. "Now here is an animal I can recommend for a lady's use."

"You'll guarantee that horse not to run away, will you?" asked Freddie, very innocently.

"That I will, madam, upon my honor. I'll give you a written guaranty if you prefer it."

"The poor creature is a sufficient guarantee in himself," she said, in a tone of quiet sarcasm; "a blind horse is seldom known to run away, I believe."

The man looked sheepish, but quickly led out another horse.

"Here then, madam, is one that I am pretty certain will suit you."

"My friend," said Freddie, laughing, "don't trouble yourself to recommend any. Though I am a lady, I know something about horses, and can quickly see whether you have one to suit us."

"Law! Don't you go buying a horse without asking somebody's advice," interposed Miss Fanny; "what can a woman know about horses?"

"And why should a woman *not* know about anything that is useful?" asked Freddie.

"Well, you'll get cheated, just see if you don't. Why can't you wait and let my brother buy you a horse, if you must have one?"

"Simply because I prefer trusting to my own judgment," Freddie answered, with a quiet tone of superiority, that was always highly exasperating to the fair Kitely, while it never failed to subdue her.

"Umph! You'll take your own way, I suppose, in spite of salvation!" she exclaimed, prefacing her remark with a kind of snort.

"Trot out that little grey mare," said Freddie to the horse dealer. He obeyed, and the animal underwent such a critical examination as convinced him that she at least knew how to *appear* to be a judge of horseflesh.

"What do you want for her?" asked Freddie, carelessly.

"Well, madam," he replied, with the air of one who makes a great concession to the person addressed, "I will let *you* have her for two hundred dollars."

"Two hundred fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Freddie, quite thrown off her guard, and using a favorite expression of her old friend the circus manager.

Freda uttered a warning cough, and was fain to cover her laughing mouth with her handkerchief.

Freddie bit her lips, and to hide her momentary confusion, took the halter from the dealer's hand, and sprang lightly on the bare back of the little grey.

"You'll tumble awf," screamed Miss Fanny.

But, without paying any regard to her, Freddie cantered up and down, changing the mare's pace to trot or gallop, and back to a canter, as if merely by an effort of her will.

Freda was charmed by the perfect ease and grace of her friend's movements; she had never seen her fine figure to such advantage.

Miss Fanny stared after her in wide-mouthed wonder.

"If that aint the beat'emest thing ever *I* saw!" exclaimed the horse dealer.

"Oh, don't she ride bootiful?" "Ah, Miss Winifred can ride jest as well as de ladies in de show." "See how easy she make de mar lope."

These and similar ejaculations were uttered by the crowd of black folks who had assembled according to their wont when anything is going on, just as if they had risen out of the earth.

Freddie stopped, and sprang to the ground. Giving the halter to the horse dealer, she said, "I will give you a hundred and twenty-five dollars for her. If you will take that, you can bring her up to the house yonder. But if you try to raise my bid by so much as one cent, I will go down to a hundred."

"Jim," said the man to his assistant, "hitch this here mar whar she was, and git. I reckon that's less'n I giv for her."

He watched for the effect this order would produce upon Freddie; but that astute young lady was not so unwise as to suffer any chagrin to be visible; and Miss Fanny had, besides, just diverted her attention into another channel.

"Them niggers is saying you ride like a circus woman," she said, spitefully.

Freda's eyes flashed indignantly; but Freddie was equal to the occasion. Fixing her eyes on a far distant point, and waving her outstretched hand horizontally, so as to give the idea of vast space, she said, in a sepulchral tone, "In the wild expanse of the Pampas of South America, in the boundless Steppes of Russian Tartary, in the trackless solitudes of the Great Sahara, the women are trained to ride the untamed steeds of the desert without saddle or bridle. Perhaps it was there that I, too, learned to ride."

Having delivered this extraordinary speech, she drooped her head upon her breast, and, with folded arms, stalked solemnly back to the house with long, slow, and majestic steps.

Freda involuntarily added to the effect by her genuine look of consternation, for she really supposed at first that her dear Freddie had suddenly become insane.

The negroes buzzed their delight, for nothing excites their admiration more than a string of high-sounding words. As for Miss Fanny, she for once found herself completely silenced.

"She must have seen a deal in her life-time," ob-

served the horse dealer, deferentially, as he prepared to lead the mare up to the house.

"You aint a-gwine to take her at her word, are you?" exclaimed Miss Fanny, roused by this spectacle; "you'll be a fool for your pains, if you do. You keep up to the two hundred dollars, and you'll git it. She wants that horse mighty bad, and she's got the money to pay for it. And what's she, I'd like to know? She's nothing but a Yankee school marm, come down here to teach them black nigger children."

"No, thank you, old lady," replied the man; "I'd only lose twenty-five dollars by following your advice. I kin judge a woman pretty nigh as well as that lady kin judge a horse, and that's saying somethin', I kin tell you. She's put her foot down right *thar*, and all I've got to do is to give in, or lose the sale."

"Umph!" snorted Miss Fanny; "it's *madam*, *madam*, for her, every word, and nothing better'n *old lady* for me. It's all along of setting them niggers free—just flying in the face of Providence, who gave them to us for slaves."

CHAPTER XXII.

A TRAP IS LAID FOR FREDDIE.

THE grey mare was for Freda, but Freddie had much greater trouble to find a horse to suit herself. Several times she heard that one of the neighboring "gentlemen" (!) desired to sell one; but when she sent to inquire about it, some insulting message was invariably returned to the effect that the owner would shoot the horse, or use it for plowing, before any d—d Yankee should have it.

One day, however, when they had just returned from the school, Freda riding her docile mare, and Freddie walking, running and leaping to her heart's content, they saw an elderly negro leading into the yard a remarkably handsome, but very wild-looking horse. He would not hitch him up, but sent to ask Miss Winifred to come out and speak to him.

Freddie went out, followed closely by Miss Fanny, as a matter of course. The man informed her that his master had sent him to offer her the horse, as he heard she wanted one. Freddie knew the name of this man, as that of a most determined rebel and Democrat, as well as a suspected member of the Ku-Klux Klan. Why *he* should design to render

her a service she could not comprehend; but a very slight survey of the horse showed her that the kindness was but in outward show, and that the real intention, in making her the apparently handsome offer, was that she should have some broken limbs, if not a broken neck. The animal had been rendered wild and vicious by ill-treatment, but that that was not his natural disposition she saw by the shape of his head. In all other respects he was a splendid creature, and the price demanded for him was not exorbitant.

"That is just the horse to suit me," said Freddie, "and I will buy him."

"Law! What do you want with such a great spirity-looking horse as that?" cried Miss Fanny, offering her advice as usual, without waiting to be asked for it. "That horse aint fit for a lady to ride. You'll get thrown off, as sure as fate. Why, I've seen Mr. Harding riding him, and it was as much as he could do to keep on. You'll just go and make a fool of yourself, if you buy him, that's what you'll do."

All this time the man who held the horse had been looking eagerly towards Freddie, and making signs that he desired to say something to her, unheard by Miss Fanny. Freddie took the bridle and turned the horse round, saying, coolly, "You had better keep clear of his heels, Miss Fanny. He'll kick."

"And you've done pushed his heels right against me!" cried that lady, springing up the steps into the house.

"What do you want to say to me?" said Freddie, in a low tone, to the negro.

"O Miss Winifred, for Gor a-mighty's sake, don't you buy dis horse! I darn't let Miss Fanny hear me say so, cos she'd tell, and I'd lose my house and my crap and all; but Mas'r Harding have ony sent him to you out of nothing but cussedness! Dis here horse has done killed one man—done broke his neck—and he's pretty near killed Mas'r Harding, too; he's done throwed him six or seven times, and Mas'r Harding said he'd have him shot; and then his brother says, No, don't do that; but sell him to those damned Yankee school marms, and when they hitch him in a buggy, he'll smash them both up. That's just what he said, for my girl Sophrony heard 'em. So just let Miss Fanny hear you say you've altered your mind, and I'll take him back again."

"But I have *not* altered my mind, my good friend. I knew, before you told me, that the creature's temper has been spoiled by ill treatment; but he is not naturally vicious, and in a few weeks, under proper training, he will be as gentle as a kitten. Don't tell Mr. Harding what I have said. I'll have the pleasure of riding by his house one of these days, and showing off a little."

The horse was taken into the tumble-down barn, which served for a stable, and fed by Freddie herself. The money was paid to the last cent, though old Jacob gave her a hint that Mas'r Harding had told him he might take fifty dollars less if she demurred about the price.

"No, Jacob," she replied, "that man has attempted my life just as much as though he had fired a gun at me, and I'll accept no concession from him. It is not fifty dollars' worth of revenge that would satisfy me, if I were going to take any revenge at all."

However, to preserve old Jacob from the temptation of telling a different tale, and putting the fifty dollars into his own pocket, Freddie drew up a receipt for the amount, to which Jacob made his mark, which was duly attested by Miss Fanny. She also wrote the amount outside the envelope in which she folded the bills, and counted them in Miss Fanny's presence. Having thus secured poor Jacob from temptation, she made him a present, and sent him on his way rejoicing.

Freda had been in the garden gathering flowers, and knew nothing of Freddie's purchase till Miss Fanny sought her out, and gave her an exaggerated account of it.

When they came into the house, Freddie was sitting in the wide entry, rocking slowly, and looking very thoughtful.

"Ah, you're beginning to repent already, I see that!" exclaimed Miss Fanny, triumphantly.

"On the contrary, I am very well satisfied with my bargain. And I was just thinking how fortunate it is that my brother is coming here in a day or two. He understands Rarey's method, and will tame that horse for me."

"Your brother! Why, you never told me you had a brother!" screamed Miss Fanny.

"And I never told you I had six sisters, did I?" said Freddie, coolly.

"No; but have you really got six sisters?"

"You'll see, if they ever pay me a visit," said Freddie, laughing; "but my brother — my twin brother—will come probably to-morrow."

"Law! I didn't know you'd had a letter since you came here. When did you hear from him?"

"Miss Kitely," replied Freddie, gravely, "I believe you have not devoted yourself to the study of the occult sciences?"

"No; what has that to do with it?" said poor Kitely, looking considerably puzzled.

"Ah, then you can form no idea of that reciprocity of a sympathetic sensibility which enables twin-born children, of peculiar idiosyncrasies, to communicate through the psychologic and magnetic power of the od force."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Can't you speak plain English? Do *you* understand what she says?" turning abruptly to Freda.

"Oh, yes, perfectly," replied that young lady, who had been very much amazed at hearing of Freddie's brother, but would not thwart her friend's plans by appearing to doubt her assertions.

"Did *you* know she'd got a brother?" asked Miss Kitely.

"I have not had the pleasure of seeing him yet," replied diplomatic Freda.

"Umph!" grunted Miss Fanny, "there's no getting a word of sense out of either of you."

And she took herself off in high dudgeon, greatly exercised about Freddie's family relations.

"You wicked girl!" exclaimed Freda, when they were alone, "how could you talk such nonsense to that poor woman, and mystify her so?"

"What business had she to ask me so many impertinent questions?" said Freddie; "she got no more than she deserved."

"But, poor soul, she knows no better," said gentle Freda; "so you should make some allowance for her. She becomes really unhappy when you overwhelm her with words that she cannot understand. And now, do tell me what you mean about your brother? You told me you had no relations at all. What *do* you mean?"

"I'll not gratify your curiosity. You are becoming as inquisitive as the Kitely herself. Wait till to-morrow, and you'll see."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FREDDIE'S TWIN BROTHER.

THE morrow came; and when it wanted about two hours of sunset, Freddie, who had artfully decoyed Freda and Miss Fanny to a distant part of the garden, suddenly uttered a little cry of delight, and ran into the house.

"Law! What's amiss with her now?" asked Miss Fanny.

"I should not wonder if her brother is come," remarked Freda.

"Let's go and see," cried the Kitely, starting off.

"Don't intrude upon them yet," said Freda, "the brother and sister will like to be alone for a little while, after being so long separated."

"I don't bother *my*self with no such fantastical notions," rejoined Miss Fanny, striding away to the house; "*I* want to see if he's there, and what he's like; and I'll say and do what I've got to say and do, in spite of salvation!"

With this favorite mode of asseveration, she gained the house, but stared blankly around. No one was visible; but the sound of voices was audible through the closed door of Freddie's room.

When Freda came up the steps she found Miss Fanny with her eye at the key-hole and her ears on the alert.

"There's somebody there, sure enough," she said, no way abashed at being discovered eaves-dropping, "and I suppose it's him. But there's something before the key-hole, so I can't see good. And they're talking some foreign lingo, too. Why can't they talk English, I wonder, so one could understand what they're saying?" Then applying her hard knuckles sharply to the panels, she shouted, "Miss Winifred, have you got your brother in there? We want to see him!"

"I'll come out presently," answered Freddie, and the conversation was renewed.

Very much edified would Miss Fanny have been could she have understood what was said; for it was a scene from one of Molière's comedies, read with dramatic effect.

Miss Fanny returned to where Freda was placidly reading, and sat down in no very amiable mood.

Presently Freddie came out of her room.

"Is it not vexatious?" she said. "Poor Tom can only stop a few hours, and all that time I must do nothing but write, write, write, to get ready some important documents which he wants to take away with him. I shall not even be able to look on while he is taming Sultan. I must have a few minutes more with him, and then he will come out and introduce himself; but no one must disturb me for anything."

Freda could not understand it, but she said nothing. As for Miss Fanny, she looked savage.

Presently a young man in a sailor's dress came forth, but stood for a few moments, holding the door ajar, and carrying on a lively conversation with Freddie, whose voice was distinctly heard, answering him from the interior of her room. Her last words were, "You tiresome fellow; I'll lock you out." Then the key was turned in the lock, and the young sailor approached with his cap in his hand. He was a well-made young fellow, of middle height, and bore a strong resemblance to Freddie, except that his hair was black. His eyebrows, too, were black and bushy, and a small black moustache clothed his upper lip.

This was how he appeared to Freda and Miss Fanny, for my readers have of course discovered that it was Freddie herself in her sailor's costume.

"Good evening, ladies," he said, taking off his cap, and making a bow that was rather more suited to the stage than to the quarter-deck of a ship,—(I must speak of Freddie in the masculine gender while she is thus travestied). "I want to see my sister's horse. I am going to tame him for her, by Rarey's method."

Miss Fanny, who had never been more than thirty miles from the place of her birth, perceived nothing incongruous in a sailor undertaking to tame a horse; but Freda, as she volunteered to show him the stable, could not help quoting from the celebrated Sairey Gamp, and whispered "'The bragian bold-

ness of that boy!' But I'll plague her a bit," she said to herself, and tapped at Freddie's door as she passed it, saying, in a loud tone, "Freddie, dear! I am going to take your brother to the stable!"

She was quite taken aback for a moment at hearing Freddie's voice answer from the inside, "Thank you, Freda dear! Don't let me be disturbed for anything,—I am so awfully busy."

Glancing round she caught the sailor's laughing grey eye, but did not dare to speak, for the Kitely was at her heels, with her mouth agape like a gudgeon, bent on catching every word.

Only at the stable door she whispered, "Be careful!" before she ran across the yard to take her place in the back entry, whence, from the vantage ground of the six or seven steps (the house being built as usual upon pillars), she could witness the operation in safety.

I need not describe Rarey's admirable mode of taming horses. Those who have witnessed it, know what it is; and those who have not, would only find a description wearisome. Suffice it, therefore, to say that Tom Wilson manipulated Sultan with very great success, to the amazement of Miss Fanny and the large assemblage of negroes, who are always on hand when anything unusual is going on. As for Freda, her feelings went far beyond wonder; she was utterly mystified. *Could* that be Freddie who leaped so lightly into the saddle, and rode so gracefully round the yard, then made Sultan jump the fence, and take a wider circuit, managing him with

all the grace of a practised horseman? No—certainly, she thought, she must be mistaken. This *must* be Tom, and not Freddie; for the sun had set before Sultan was finally consigned to his stable; the short twilight was darkening into night, and there was a light in Freddie's room! Who but she could have lighted it? And how could she light it, if she were not in the room?

Tom went to his sister's door, and turned the handle.

"Come, Freddie," he said, "why don't you let me in? I want to wash my hands."

"You know, Tom, I have not a moment to spare," answered Freddie's voice from the interior of the room; "if I let you come in, you must be very quiet."

"All right," said Tom, rattling at the lock, which was immediately opened, and in he went.

A brisk conversation was carried on between the two, while Tom was washing his hands. The door was then opened again, and Freddie called to Freda.

"Oh, Freda!" she exclaimed, "I cannot write a word while this boy is here! If you will play a hornpipe on your guitar he will dance for your amusement, and perhaps he will play on his violin too. Now go along, Tom, there's a good boy!"

A lively altercation, followed by a playful scuffle, took place, which ended by Tom's being forcibly ejected, and the door banged behind him. He turned and tried to get in again, making a considerable noise with the handle; but the door appeared to be locked on the inside, and he walked away with his hands in

his pockets. This scene was performed so cleverly that Freda could hardly believe that there was only one actor in it. And then the lamp! Who could have lighted that?

"Stupid that I am!" was her next thought, "she left it burning when she came out to tame Sultan, and it was not seen while the sun was shining!"

The guitar was tuned, and Freda played the hornpipe in spirited style. Then the young sailor, having hitched up his waist-band in true nautical fashion, performed that delightful dance with a grace and finish that T. P. Cooke, or Davenport, could not have excelled.

The windows and door were crowded with black faces, beaming with delight, and uttering yells of applause,—and yet all could not see, especially the children. So the performance was repeated in the yard, by the light of blazing pine knots; the firm hard sand affording excellent footing.

The young sailor next played several airs on the violin, making his susceptible audience (all except Miss Fanny) laugh or cry at pleasure. After that, the torches were lighted up again, and the hornpipe was repeated, just because some more black folks had arrived, and were bemoaning their ill luck in having missed the spectacle.

The moment it was over, Tom rushed to Freddie's room, and was instantly admitted. When he came out the entry was in partial darkness, for Freda still sat on the top step, playing the tune of the hornpipe, while several of the darkies were attempting

to imitate the steps of the dance. Miss Fanny was at full grin, enjoying the fun as much as any, and scarcely heard the sailor's words as, in a voice broken by sobs, he bade them good-bye, and bounded away down the front steps, through the garden and out into the darkness of the night.

Freda kept the negroes engaged for ten minutes longer, and no one saw a figure that passed along by the other side of the house, and lightly swung itself up through the window of Freddie's now darkened room.

Freda went to the door of her friend's apartment, and receiving an invitation, went in, and found Freddie lying on her bed, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"It is so hard," she sobbed, "to see so little of one's only brother."

"Why didn't he stop longer?" demanded Miss Fanny, who had come in as usual without knocking.

"It was impossible," sighed Freddie, "his leave of absence had expired."

"Freddie!" said Freda, when they were alone, "I did not suspect you of being such a dreadful hypocrite!"

"Not a hypocrite at all, dear; only an actress."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A KU-KLUX PLOT.

GILBERT was placed in a very unpleasant predicament in being the depository of a secret unconsciously betrayed to him. But he knew that the most honorable and straightforward course was to come to a thorough explanation and understanding on the subject. This he did as soon as his patient was sufficiently recovered to bear the excitement without injurious consequences.

Rupert Forester, strange to say, seemed to be in no way annoyed that his family secret was known to another person; nay, it seemed that half the burthen was removed from his mind, since it was shared by one so noble and true-hearted as he knew Gilbert Bracebridge to be.

On one point only there was no confidence between them. Gilbert could not bring himself to speak about Winifred; and Rupert, concluding from his friend's silence that he had not mentioned her during his feverish ravings, also forbore to allude to her; and thus the mutual silence grew upon them until it became almost an impossibility for either of them to break it.

Thus they went on, till Rupert could be left without danger. Gilbert then exacted from him a promise that he would await his return in the quiet and healthful abode which he had found for him a few miles out of the noisy city, and started off to New York.

On inquiring at the Freedmen's Bureau, he learned that Miss Winifred Trevanian was in South Carolina, teaching a colored school, within a few miles of the place where he had himself been similarly engaged immediately after the war.

A few days later he was wending his way through a wild tract of forest land, with a knapsack on his back, a revolver in his pocket, and a Winchester rifle over his shoulder.

In the heart of the wood he came upon a small clearing, on which stood a log hut rather more neatly built than the generality of the negroes' cottages. An acre of cultivated ground, which surrounded it, was carefully fenced, and bore signs of unusually skilful tillage.

At the sound of his footsteps a lean and wolfish-looking dog ran towards him, barking furiously; but he quickly changed his hostile demonstrations into marks of delighted recognition, when Gilbert spoke to him.

The man who lived in this hut, who in fact owned it, having bought the solitary acre on which it was built, had suffered grievous wrong from the oppressors of his race, even beyond the lot of most of his people. At the very moment when freedom seemed

almost within his grasp, towards the close of the war (for the slaves contrived to keep themselves better acquainted with the progress of events than their masters imagined), when he knew that by law they were already free, his wife and children had been sold to the *speculators*, and carried away to the far South. His half-sister, too, a beautiful mulatto girl, and the half-sister of the man who sold her, had been taken at the same time. He had never been able to find a trace of them, though what fate awaited his sister and his pretty young daughters it was not difficult to imagine.

Gilbert had been his friend during the period of his deepest trouble. He had assisted him to buy the bit of land, and had toiled many a day to clear it, and help to build the simple dwelling. It was no wonder that the dog knew and fawned upon him.

"Are you at home, Sam?" he called out, as he approached the door, which stood wide open.

"Come in, come in, for God's sake!" responded a man's voice, interrupted by groans. "Who is it?"

"Why, Sam, what ails you? Have you got the chills?"

The owner of the cottage was lying on his bed, apparently in great agony.

"Oh, sir," he exclaimed, as he recognized his visitor, "God be praised that you are come! I've not got the chills, sir, but my leg is broken."

"That must be seen to, first of all," said Gilbert, cheerily; "and don't be uneasy about it. It's not the first broken limb that I have set, by many."

With great skill and tenderness he reduced the fracture, and bound up the injured limb with such appliances as he could improvise. When all was done, and his patient somewhat easier, Gilbert inquired into the cause of the accident.

It was one of those stories of cruelty, perpetrated for no other object than the gratification of the most devilish wickedness, so many of which are current among the black population.

The poor fellow was returning home on the previous day, when he was attacked by four or five men (white, I need hardly say), and dragged into the midst of a dense mass of pine and cedar wood, on the borders of a large and deep creek. Whether their object was to hang or drown him, he did not know. One of them had a rope, and they were searching about for something, probably, he thought, a stone, to which they meant to tie him, in order to keep him down in the water, when he managed to cut his bonds asunder, and ran for his life. He stumbled over a fallen tree and broke his leg, and, as he lay behind it, they missed him. From his hiding place he saw them lighting matches, and trying to kindle a blaze by which to trace him, for the wood was so thick that it was almost as dark as night. They gave up the search at length, and went away.

He crawled out, and was fortunately seen by another white man, who had compassion on his sad plight, and cut for him a rude sort of crutch out of a forked branch of a tree. With this he managed to drag himself home, though suffering the most fearful agony.

It had taken him all the night to accomplish the painful journey of about two miles, and he had begun to think he should die there, unaided, when the Lord sent him his best friend at the time of his greatest need.

Gilbert not only nursed and doctored, but he cooked for him. He hewed wood and kindled a fire; shot some game, made corn cakes; and all the time waited on his poor black friend with as much assiduity as he had shown towards the white gentleman, Rupert Forester. The fact was, that Gilbert believed in the existence of black gentlemen as well as white ones, and Sam Watson was a fine specimen of the former class.

Finally, when night came, and the poor sufferer slept, soothed by the cold water which Gilbert constantly applied to the broken limb, the latter stretched himself out on the bare floor, and slumbered soundly.

Day after day he continued his ministrations, never leaving the cabin except in search of game. One day the nearest neighbor looked in, and thenceforward Sam had no lack of sympathizing visitors and willing messengers, when any article was required from the stores. The presence of a white man in the hut of a negro was, however, kept a profound secret; for, had such an enormity reached the ears of the "chivalry," it is probable that nothing short of the death of both the recreant white and the presumptuous black would have satisfied their outraged honor.

During all this time Gilbert heard not a word concerning the Winifred of whom he had come in

search. He was four long miles from the district where her school was situated, which accounted for her name not being mentioned by the people who came to Sam's cottage; and, as for uttering it himself, that was impossible. Even when he thought of her, a burning blush overspread his honest brow, and he would willingly have been buried a thousand fathoms beneath the sea. Surely, he sometimes said to himself, there must be some inherent, fearful depravity in his soul, of which he was not otherwise conscious, that he could have fallen in love with his own niece, and even looked his passion into her eyes, without feeling in his heart the remonstrances of violated nature. His remorse was like a wolf gnawing at his vitals. He was, in his own esteem, an outcast from humanity, with worse than the brand of Cain upon him. At times his horror of himself was so great he was only restrained from suicide by remembering the duty that he owed to others.

He alone could restore Rupert to happiness, for he alone possessed a clew to Winifred's abode. The purpose on which he was bent was to bring them together, himself unrecognized by her; to exact from Rupert a promise to keep their relationship a secret from her (for would she not think of him with loathing and shame?) and then to go among the most uncivilized of the Indian tribes, as a social missionary. Not to cram them with sectarian doctrines, or excite them to spasmodic conversions, before they understood the nature of a moral obligation; but to commence with a foundation of social re-

form, advance then to the moral, and let the religious be, what it should be, the natural outgrowth of these.

Sam was now rapidly improving, and Gilbert saw it was time to bestir himself, especially as many tales were rife of outrages committed by a band of Ku-Klux, or, as the negroes generally called them, Bush-whackers; and of threats fulminated by various white men of the Democratic party, against the Northern teachers who persisted in giving instruction to the despised colored children.

He therefore took the opportunity afforded by the presence of a visitor who could remain till his return, and went to make a *reconnaissance.*

As he drew near the school-house, the troops of children, with their satchels and dinner-buckets, guided him on the way without inquiry. They were hurrying home to escape an impending storm, which added to the growing darkness of the November evening.

The school-house was a rough building of logs, with a chimney built of stones and mud, from which a smoke was still rising.

There was no fastening on the door, so he pushed it open and entered, just as the storm of rain and sleet came down in real earnest.

As the shutters were closed over the unglazed windows, the interior would have been in total darkness, but for a few rays of light that came down the chimney and through the ill-fitting boards that composed the roof. The floor was only the bare earth, beaten hard by the children's feet; the seats were benches of hewn pine, of the rudest construction.

Gilbert pushed the smouldering logs together, resolving to remain under shelter till the storm was over. Placing a form before the hearth, he stretched himself upon it and fell asleep, lulled by the monotonous pattering of the rain upon the roof, and the whistling of the wind through the thousand crevices of the building.

The sound of trampling hoofs, and the voices of several men, speaking in cautious tones, awoke him with a start. The fire was out, and the darkness was impenetrable, but he remembered the position of the forms well enough to enable him to find his way to the further end of the house without making any noise. He there lay down close to the wall, where only a powerful light, or very close inspection, could discover him.

The door was thrown open, and several persons entered.

"Can you get a light?" asked one. "We had better see that no one else is sheltering in the damned old shanty."

Some matches were struck, and a hasty examination made, which satisfied them that no eavesdroppers were present. The temporary gleam showed Gilbert five men, four of whom bore the unmistakable stamp of their Southern origin; but the fifth he could not so easily make out. As he held a match and came near to him, Gilbert had a good view of his face; and a more hideous countenance he had never beheld. It was, in fact, that of Captain Grainger. He had called in the aid of art to conceal his deformity; and a wig, a glass eye,

and false teeth, beard, and moustache, did something towards making him less repulsive; but the loss of his nose could not be hidden, while the fixed stare of the artificial eye contrasted strangely with the restlessness of the living one.

The brief glimmer of the matches expired, and much to Gilbert's satisfaction, no more were lighted.

"It is understood, then, gentlemen," said one, who appeared from his tone to exercise some authority over the rest, "that we are to meet at the cross roads to-morrow night, at eleven o'clock."

"We all understand that," replied the others.

"I propose, as an amendment, that we meet here," said one, "it is nearer the place we are going to, and is, besides, more retired."

"Very well," replied the leader, "let it be here, then, and at eleven, punctually."

"Why wait till to-morrow night?" demanded a voice which Gilbert felt sure was that of an Englishman, and which from its snuffling intonation, he had no hesitation in ascribing to the man who had lost his nose; "we have our disguises here,—why lose any time about it?"

"Ay, why indeed?" said another. "There are five of us,—our friend here says there is but one bull nigger on the place, so we shall only have to deal with the two women. Why wait till to-morrow?"

"No, no, gentlemen," cried another, anxiously; "remember your promise, and give me time to get my sister out of the way. I'll take her to a revival meeting to-morrow, and she will stay away all

night. That will give you a good chance. You would be but four, any way, if you went on to-night, for I could not very well join in an attack on my own house."

"It must be to-morrow, as we agreed," said the leader; "four would be more than enough for the work, but it is best to show an overwhelming force."

"I trust you will warn them all to be careful, and do no injury to the house," said the man who had objected to an immediate attack. "You may shoot the Yankee school marms if you will, but don't injure my property."

"Your property shall be respected, as I have promised; but those girls must be driven away. Curse them! I thought when I sold them that fiery devil of a horse that I had as good as broken both their necks. But that tall girl has him as tame as a pet lamb. She came riding past my house the other day, for nothing in the world but to show him off."

"She rides splendidly," observed one.

"I wish she'd ride to hell!" growled the leader. "Is it not enough that we are taxed to pay for educating our own chattels, as if they were our equals, but we must submit to be insulted by these upstart minxes?"

"Gentlemen, the rain is over," said the one-eyed man; "if we are not to proceed at once to business, we had better be moving homewards. And here let me beg that all who join our little expedition to-morrow, may be duly notified that I have stipulated

for time to overhaul the luggage of these women, and take possession of a box of valuable documents which belongs to me, and of which they have obtained unlawful possession."

"I don't like to dirty my hands with anything that looks like robbery," said one of the men, haughtily.

"Nor I," said another. "I'll have nothing to do with it."

"Gentlemen," said the leader, "he has explained the case to me, and I have promised that we will wait for him, while he looks for his papers. Nothing more will be required of you."

They left the hut. Hasty "good-nights" were exchanged, and the sound of their horses' hoofs was soon lost in the distance.

CHAPTER XXV.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

THE two young teachers anticipated a quiet, comfortable evening, secure from the tiresome intrusion of Miss Fanny Kitely, who had gone with her brother to hear a revivalist preacher, and would not return till the following evening.

The time passed quickly away, and they were about to separate for the night, when a heavy footfall was heard slowly ascending the front steps.

Freda turned pale, and Freddie put her hand on her revolver.

They listened anxiously. There was one feeble knock against the door, and that was all.

"I'll ask who it is," said Freddie, going out into the entry; "no danger can come with such a feeble-minded knock as that. Who's out there?" she demanded, resolutely.

"It's me, Miss Fanny," answered a quavering voice, as of a very old man.

"And who are you?"

"Don't you know me? I'm Job Parsons. Can you give me shelter for the night?"

Convinced that the person outside was old and

feeble, Freddie opened the door, and beheld an old white-headed man, whose bowed figure and shabby clothes betokened his age and poverty.

"Will you tell Miss Fanny I'm here?" he said, and his weak tremulous voice sounded very pathetic. "She'll not refuse me a shelter, I know. She never does."

"Miss Fanny is not at home to-night," replied Freddie, "but you had better come in and rest, and I'll see if you can be accommodated with a lodging."

"For God's sake, miss, don't send me further this night. I'm done tired out now, and I've got the rheumatics so bad I can hardly walk."

In effect it was evident, as he hobbled into the house, that his left knee was quite stiffened. Freda had now come forward, and her tender heart was greatly moved by the forlorn looks of the visitor, and especially by the shabby genteel appearance which was imparted to him by a miserably ragged old pair of cotton gloves which covered his trembling hands.

"We can't turn him out on such a cold night," she whispered to Freddie, "poor old man! He would perish before he went another mile, so lame as he is. If he is a friend of Miss Fanny's, let him have her room. I'm sure she would not object to it."

"I think I will call Hannah over to see if she knows him," said Freddie.

"They all went to bed long ago, and you would not be able to waken them," said Freda; "let the

poor man have Miss Fanny's room. It is quite *impossible* to send him away. It would be enough to kill him."

Thus then it was arranged. The offer of refreshment being thankfully declined, the aged visitor was inducted into the room made vacant by Miss Fanny's absence, and the young ladies returned to the apartment they had just quitted, where they sat for a while talking over the fire.

Freddie had just concluded the narration of Miss Thudichum's adventure with the pie, when the dogs in the yard set up a vociferous barking, entirely drowning the noise of horses' feet which would otherwise have been audible in the front garden.

"I wonder what ails the dogs?" said Freda.

"Coons or 'possums, perhaps," replied Freddie, going to the window and peeping out beside the curtain.

There was no moon, but by the dim light of the few stars that were visible, she saw that the garden was filled with horsemen, enveloped in white draperies that descended from their heads to the ground, concealing both horse and man completely.

"Be brave, Freda," she said, in a firm voice, "the Ku-Klux are here. That man may be one of them. I'll lock him in."

She ran into the entry, Freda following with the lamp, very pale, but as collected as herself. She locked the door where they supposed the old man to be sleeping, and at the same moment a violent knocking was commenced, accompanied by repeated

commands from those without to open the door. But the old man was not secured. There he stood, erect and vigorous, every trace of decrepitude gone, excepting his silvery hair; his knee no longer stiff with rheumatism, but a large rifle in his hands.

"Go in there, and keep quiet," he said, pointing to the room they had just left; "don't bother me, and I will protect you."

"I will protect myself," cried Freddie, drawing her revolver, and eyeing him fiercely; "if you play us false, your life shall be the first to be sacrificed!"

"Brave girl," he responded, calmly, "let it be so! But let me have a shot at these fellows first."

He opened the door a few inches, planting his foot against it to prevent the ingress of any of the assailants; looked out for an instant, and then fired. There was a cry and the sound of a fall. Again and again the deadly report of the terrible breech-loader rang through the midnight air. There were cries as of pain, oaths and imprecations, and the confused trampling of horses. The stranger flung the door wide, and fired after the ruffians, now in full retreat, though shooting back at random. Freddie came to his side, and had the pleasure of seeing that more than one carried away a memento from her revolver.

Freda acted with wonderful courage and presence of mind. When his first shot convinced her that their mysterious inmate was indeed a friend, and not an accomplice of the enemy, she drew aside the curtains from the front window, and held the lamp close to the glass in such a way as to throw its light upon

the white-robed figures, and render them a good mark for the rifle of their brave defender.

In the space of two minutes from the first alarm, nothing was left of the affray but a strong smell of gunpowder, and the wounded man.

The stranger was gone; how or where, they knew no more than they knew where the eddying wreaths of smoke had vanished.

"He *was* here!" said Freddie, as though half doubtful of her own senses.

"I am *sure* he was," repeated Freda, in much the same state of mind.

They looked into Miss Fanny's room; but found no trace of him but the old cotton gloves, which Freda took possession of, and carefully preserved out of gratitude to their unknown deliverer.

Now that the danger was over, both the girls were trembling violently, and seemed to have lost the self-possession which had sustained them in the time of actual trial. A groan from the wounded man made them start, and Freda closed the door hurriedly, and drew the bolt.

"It's the man that was shot," said Freddie; "*he* can't hurt us. We ought to see to him, though he is a Ku-Klux. Perhaps our friend is with him."

She took the lamp and went out. The man was lying where he had fallen, at the foot of the steps, with his face upturned, and surrounded by a pool of blood. Freddie lowered her lamp to look at him; but instantly started back, bounded up the steps, and fastened the door.

A great horror was on her face as she turned and looked at Freda, speechless and pale.

"Oh, what is it? Tell me, Freddie, what is it?"

"We must not have that man in here," whispered Freddie; "how could the wretch have tracked you? Oh, if he would only die there! But we must call for help, and have him sent somewhere, till the police, if there be a police in this lawless region, can take charge of him."

"But, Freddie, who is it? Pray tell me at once."

"It's that horrible one-eyed man—that Captain Grainger—against whom your Rupert warned me so earnestly. We must make our escape while he is in prison, unless he dies. Hark, they've come back to fetch him! I hear voices outside."

They listened anxiously, dreading a renewal of the assault; but the rich soft tones were those of Africans, and consequently of friends.

The door was thrown open instantly. There were about a dozen black men standing round the wounded ruffian, many of them armed with guns.

"The Lord be praised," burst from several voices as the teachers appeared, "the ladies is safe! We heard the firing and came as quick as we could, but the bush-whackers was all done gone when we got here."

"Did they shoot at you ladies? Did they shoot all the guns we heard? Did they hurt you any? Thank the Lord, you are alive!"

These questions and exclamations came thick and fast, accompanied by fervent hand-shakings, laughter and tears.

"The best part of the shooting was on our side," replied Freddie, "as that poor wretch proves. We had a powerful friend to defend us; a stranger, who came and begged a night's lodging, saying he was a friend of Miss Fanny's. He looked like a very old man, and quite lame; but his lame leg must have been made by hiding his rifle inside his trousers, for he came out, strong and active, and defended us so bravely. Can you guess who he was?"

"That must have been the tall man we met in the road, who told us to come on here quickly."

"Who was he? Which way was he going?"

"It must have been one of themselves, I reckon, and the Lord Jesus had done converted him."

"Mos' likely it was Mas'r Dick," said a young fellow who had not yet spoken.

"What, Mr. Roy!" exclaimed Freddie, contemptuously; "this man was head and shoulders taller than Mr. Roy, and strong as a lion."

"No, no!" repeated two or three of the negroes, "the man we met was not Mr. Roy."

"Now, my friends," said Freda, "something must be done for that man. We cannot have him in here, Miss Fanny would not like it. If there is a constable you had better fetch him, or carry the man to his house."

"I reckon we can tote him. That'll be the shortest way."

"Yes, by all means tote him away," said Freddie, "and I hope that some of you who have guns, will remain about the place the rest of the night."

All the women and children on the premises were astir by this time. They had heard the trampling of the horses, the loud voices, and the shots, but had not ventured out, lest they should draw upon themselves the malice of their vindictive oppressors.

The young ladies made free with Miss Fanny's stores, and gave out a liberal allowance of coffee, sugar, bacon, and flour, from which the women proceeded to prepare a relishing supper for the guard.

"And then," observed Freddie, "as Dan Fletcher is there, they will be sure to extemporize a prayer-meeting, which will keep them lively till morning."

"Does it seem credible," said Freda, looking at her watch, "that it is only half an hour since we sat here and said it was time to go to bed? I have not had time even to think of all that has happened! How wonderful it seems that Captain Grainger should have been amongst those—those demons!"

"Birds of a feather flock together," replied Freddie. "And there is yet another wonderful fact, Freda, that I have only just remembered. Before our friend fired his first shot, he looked out, and took a careful aim. That shot no doubt brought down Captain Grainger."

"How could that be, dear, when they were all disguised so that they looked alike?"

"Some of them were talking,—I heard one of them say, 'Remember your promise, gentlemen, and wait for me,'—and then the gun went off, and I

heard a yell, and a fall on the steps. Oh, Freda! When I heard that, I felt like fighting!"

"You wild creature!" said Freda, caressingly. "And you *did* fight. I heard a pistol going off, as well as a rifle."

"Don't you talk, Miss Propriety!" cried Freddie, breaking into a laugh; "who held the light, I wonder?"

"And who, I wonder," said Freda, "is that noble man who must have come here to-night, purposely to protect us? Why did he come in that disguise? How did he know the very time appointed for their murderous attack? I can only account for it on the supposition of his belonging to their gang, but repenting of his participation in their crimes, and resolving to atone for it by at least one good deed."

"No, indeed, you are wrong!" replied Freddie, warmly. "I am positive that he does not, and never did, belong to them. Use your senses, Freda. Does *he* look like a midnight assassin?"

"My dear Freddie," said Freda, laying her hand on her friend's shoulder, and looking earnestly in her face; "you are not quite frank with me. You believe this stranger to be a certain somebody of whose existence you have never yet told me, though you know all the story of *my* love. Who is he?"

"I don't know," sobbed Freddie, sliding on to the floor, and burying her face in Freda's lap. "There is nothing to tell. I only saw him once!"

"Oh, Freddie! Freddie! *You* in tears! This is terrible!" said Freda, as she tenderly drew her wet

cheek upon her bosom. "But there must be something to tell, if there is enough to weep about. What is it, dearest? Have you not comforted me in my sorrows, and will you refuse me a share in your own?"

And then, amid sobs and blushes, Freddie confided to her companion the story of her meeting with Gilbert, and every word—so carefully treasured up in her memory—that he had said to her. And how she loved him, with a love that gathered strength from its very hopelessness; and how she had never thought to see him again, but was resolved to live and die unmarried, for his sake. In conclusion, she told how for one moment, and one moment only, she had thought she recognized him under the disguise of their white-haired visitor. It was when, thrown off his guard by the urgency of the situation, he had called her a brave girl, and given her leave to shoot him after he had fired at their assailants.

"But, after all," she sighed, "I don't believe it could be he. How could he know where I was? And is it likely he would follow me if he did know? And supposing he had followed me, why should he disguise himself, and run the risk of being refused admittance?"

"After advising you to apply to the bureau, what more easy than to inquire for you there?"

"But he did not know my name," said Freddie.

"Could he not have ascertained it before he left the village?"

Freddie smiled. It is so pleasant to have such objections overruled.

"Secondly, why should he give you all that advice, and all those instructions, unless he wanted to have a clew by which to follow you?"

Another smile, accompanied by a sigh of contentment.

"And for your last objection,—I take it for granted that he had good reasons for assuming that disguise, which he will explain in due time. For, take my word for it, Freddie, we have not seen the last of him; and it is an immense consolation to me to know that we have such a protector near us."

The smile was accompanied this time by a hearty kiss.

"Crying makes my head ache," said Freddie, very much subdued; "let us lie down on your bed awhile, dear, and rest, even if we cannot sleep."

Freddie, however, soon fell asleep; and Freda, with a new-born sentiment of patronage and protection towards her strong and courageous friend, lay awake till morning, brooding over her, in spirit, like a maternal dove.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FRIENDLY ADVICE.

FREDDIE'S first idea, on awaking, was that she had been under the influence of a terrible dream; but the events of the past night quickly presented themselves to her mind as realities, and Freda's comforting arguments also recurred to her; the natural consequence of which was that she bestowed more than usual care upon her dress and appearance. Her trouble was thrown away, however, for nobody came, except Miss Fanny, whose wonderings and questionings about the occurrences of the previous night were as tormenting as an army of mosquitoes.

They did not think it safe to keep school, lest their enemies, goaded by their recent defeat, should carry out their often-repeated threat of burning the school-house, and they could only escape from Miss Fanny's persecution by locking her out;—an expedient to which her extreme ignorance of the usages of civilized life, sometimes compelled them to resort.

One of Miss Fanny's peculiarities was a habit of talking at the full pitch of her voice, which afforded her inmates the opportunity of enjoying her intellectual conversation whenever they chose to listen.

"What is she talking about now?" said Freda.

"That don't make no difference, I reckon," Miss Fanny was heard to say; "give it to me,—it's all the same. No, nor you can't go in, I tell you, nor you can't see 'em; for the door's locked. And if it's locked for me, it's locked for a nigger, I reckon. What are you afraid of?"

"I wasn't to give it to nobody but one of the ladies," was shouted out by a powerful young African voice, with the evident intention of making himself heard inside the house.

"Well,—you needn't deafen one with your shouting!" screamed Miss Fanny. "Why don't you give it to me, then? Aint I one of the ladies?"

A loud laugh was the only audible response.

"It must be something for us," said Freddie, going out.

A boy of ten or twelve stood in the yard, and beside him Miss Fanny, in a wild state of excitement. The moment Freddie appeared, the lad pulled off his cap, and held out a paper to her, saying,

"Please 'm, here's a letter for you."

"Thank you," said Freddie, as she took it from him; "please wait till I see whether it requires an answer."

"What is it about?" demanded Miss Fanny, running up the steps, and following Freddie to the door of the room where Freda was, with the manifest design of pushing herself in.

"Miss Fanny," said Freddie, turning on the threshold and confronting her, "I cannot tell what

it is about until I have read it. Neither do I yet know whether it belongs to my friend or to myself. But when we have read it, should we find that it in any way concerns you, we will certainly inform you of it."

She stepped backward, and by a quick movement, closed the door, and drew the bolt.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Miss Fanny, and immediately she proceeded to question the messenger, and try to find out who had sent the missive which so strongly stimulated her curiosity.

The note was written on a scrap of soiled and rumpled paper that looked as if it had been the fly-leaf of a book. It was written in pencil, in a fine bold masculine hand, but bore no signature nor superscription.

The two girls read it at the same time:

"It is not safe for you to remain where you now are. An imperative duty demands your presence in California, though you know it not. Send a line by the bearer, saying by what train you will set off, and you will be protected on your journey by one who has already served you."

"What shall we do?" said Freda.

"Do?" repeated Freddie, "do as he says, certainly. We are *not* safe here, there's no question about that. And why should we not go to California as well as anywhere else?"

"How can we be sure that this is not a *ruse* of the enemy?" said the cautious Freda. "There is a tone of mystery about that imperative duty which

demands our presence in California, that I don't like. A warning to us to leave this neighborhood is nothing, for we have already determined to leave it. But why try to induce us to go to California? Isolated creatures as we both are, to whom can we owe any especial duty? *I* at least owe none, except to Rupert,—but that is utterly incredible and impossible."

There was a shudder in Freddie's voice, as she whispered, "Ernest Templeman!"

"Was *he* the man who defended us?" exclaimed Freda, in astonishment.

"No, no, no! A thousand times *no!*" vociferated Freddie, "but he may be here with Captain Grainger, and this may be a plot contrived between them. We must be very careful."

"I'll write a note," said Freda, "and if you agree to it, we can send it."

She wrote as follows:

"We cannot place implicit confidence in a person who, without any apparent reason, shrouds himself in mystery. If the writer of the note will prove to us that he is the friend to whom we are already so deeply indebted, we will follow his counsel, though we should prefer to know the nature of the duty which, he asserts, calls us so far away."

"That's excellent," exclaimed Freddie; "but there's another difficulty in the way—the horses."

"We cannot part with them," said Freda, "though how to manage about them I don't know. I'll tell him the difficulty. He may suggest something."

Forthwith she added to the note: "We are likewise determined not to leave our favorite horses to the mercy of our enemies. It will take time to arrange for their transit, as money must be obtained from New York."

Freddie took this note to the messenger, and saw him start off at a rapid pace.

"You wouldn't tell me *your* secret, and now I wont tell you what *I*'ve heard," screamed Miss Fanny, close to her ear.

"You are very welcome to keep it to yourself," replied Freddie, good-humoredly; "you know that I don't trouble myself much about other people's affairs, Miss Fanny."

Freddie did not bolt the door again, and was discussing with Freda whether she should write at once to the New York bank for a remittance, or wait till they heard again from their unknown adviser, when Miss Fanny came in and sat down by the fire.

"So you don't care to hear the news?" she remarked.

"Not unless it is anything that concerns us," replied Freda.

"Well, I reckon this don't concern you at all," said Miss Fanny; "it's only about the poor fellow that was shot last night."

Had Miss Fanny been a keen observer, she would have seen that both her auditors gave a perceptible start.

"Is he dead?" asked Freddie, quietly, as she went

on with the piece of needlework on which she was engaged.

"No, he aint dead. He's done got off."

Freda raised a white face, and stared at her informant; but Freddie gave her arm a warning pressure.

"How was that?" she asked, in a tone of indifference, as if she did not care much whether she got an answer or not, "did he break out of the calaboose?"

"Oh, no. He was bailed out, and he's gone to his friends."

"Indeed! Does he live in this neighborhood?"

"I don't know exactly where he lives; they've took him to widow Benson's, I'm told."

After this the two girls maintained a profound silence, which, experience had taught them, was the surest means of getting rid of their tiresome landlady. Freddie hastened her departure by the simple *ruse* of pretending to listen attentively to a conversation that was going on among the black people in the yard.

Miss Fanny went out to see what it was, and the bolt was shot behind her.

"Is not this terrible?" said Freda, "your enemy and mine are probably both in this neighborhood, working together for our destruction. What can we do? Now that I know Captain Grainger is at large, I feel confident it was he who sent that letter."

"We shall be able to judge better of that when

the next comes," replied Freddie. "I hope it will come to-night, and that we shall then find, beyond a doubt, that our brave friend has not forsaken us. Even though Captain Grainger is at liberty, we cannot have much to fear from him. He was too badly wounded to do much mischief for some time to come."

"Nevertheless, I shall pack up, and be ready to start at a moment's notice," said Freda.

Freddie agreed to do the same, as nothing would be lost by being prepared. She was finishing her operations by the last glimmer of twilight, when Freda entered her room hastily.

"O Freddie," she exclaimed, "I fear something dreadful is going to happen! What can be done? A man is at my window, with a message from the wounded Ku-Klux, begging Miss Winifred to go to him, and speak to him before he dies. Of course, it is me that he wants to see, but I dare not go. And yet if I don't go, perhaps he will come here. What can I do?"

"Who is the man who brought the message, and why did he come to the window?"

"He is a man whom I have often seen at church," said Freda, "and he came to the window to avoid Miss Fanny. What *shall* I do?"

"Keep up your courage, dear; that's the best thing you can do. Let me speak to this man. If there seems any necessity for Miss Winifred to go, remember *I* am Miss Winifred here, and I will go."

"No, indeed, you shall not! I will not let you risk your life for me."

"If Captain Grainger is really dying, he may have something to tell that it is important for you to know. What if it should relate to that hidden trouble that caused your Rupert to disappear so strangely? I promise to be cautious, but if the man is dying, I must and will go. I shall take my revolver."

The messenger assured her that he had seen the wounded man lying in his bed; that he said he was dying, and that he looked as if he had not long to live.

Freddie did not hesitate for a moment. She put on a hat with a large and thick veil, which she tied under her chin, in such a way as to conceal her features as much as possible without exactly covering her face, and mounting her horse, with the negro for a guide, she set off for Mrs. Benson's house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

KU-KLUX LAW.

THE widow was one of the class of "poor white trash" to which Miss Fanny also belonged, and had given shelter to the wounded man from no motives of Christian charity, but for the sake of the money which she would get for it. This Freddie learned from her guide, as he walked by her side.

The man being on foot, she was, of course, obliged to walk her horse all the way, and it was quite dark before they arrived. Leaving Sultan in the care of her guide, she went in. Mrs. Benson, it seemed, knew her by sight, for, without a word, she led her into one of the front rooms, saying, "Here's Miss Winifred, Captain."

A smoky lamp partially illuminated the chamber, and showed its miserable and squalid furniture. Freddie advanced towards the dingy-looking bed, beside which a broken chair was placed.

"Are you Winifred?" demanded a hollow voice.

"That is my name," she replied, "why have you sent for me? I came, because your messenger said that you were dying."

"Leave the room, will you, Mrs. Benson?" said

Captain Grainger, "I have something of importance to say to this young lady. See that the door is shut," he continued, when the woman was gone, "and then come back. Winifred—do you know who I am?"

"I never saw you before. How should I know you?"

"You may well think that you never saw me before," he answered, with a bitter laugh, "how should you recognize in this scarred and mutilated visage the features of the handsomest man that, perhaps, ever walked this earth?"

"Were *you* ever handsome?" said she, incredulously, "surely you are joking."

"This is no time for joking. I tell you I was more than handsome—I was magnificently beautiful. Can you not remember the noblest-looking man you ever saw?"

"I certainly do not remember *you*," replied Freddie. "Was it to say this that you sent for me?"

"Not altogether. Do you recollect your father, Winifred?"

"I have no very distinct recollection of him," she replied, with perfect truth.

"Your memory is not a very good one, it seems. *I* am your father."

"*You!*" repeated Freddie, starting up, "that is impossible!"

"You recollect, then, what I was," he said, complacently,—his intense personal vanity making him attribute her astonishment to the change in his

appearance. "It is indeed difficult to realize that anything so perfect as my face once was, could ever be reduced to this mass of deformity. Curses on the hand that wrought the ruin! But I will soon convince you. Do you remember the night when your mother's cottage was burnt down?"

"I know something about it," responded Freddie, evasively.

"Your mother had that evening given to me a certain casket of jewels, which I was taking away to sell for her, when I was attacked by a man who had been her lover, whom she had discarded for me. He shot me down before I could defend myself. I fell with my face on my own pistol, which exploded, —and this is the result!"

He paused, as if expecting her to make some comment. Had she given utterance to her thoughts she would have said, "and served you right!" but she remained silent, and he went on.

"He robbed me of the jewels, and then went back and set the house on fire. Your angel mother, as I learned long afterwards, when my terrible wounds were healed, never recovered from the shock, and your life, my adored child, was nearly sacrificed. I had—as you may perhaps remember—playfully locked you in your room, little suspecting that a fiend in human form would fire the house. However, the neighbors—brave French peasants—assembled and rescued you. I dare not think of that period of misery. I merely allude to it to prove to you that I am really your most unfortunate father.

The robber and would-be murderer kept possession of your jewels, for I always called them yours, my child—my Winifred's Jewels; I could not recover them by law, for I had no witnesses. But I haunted him, and worked upon him, till at length I compelled him to restore them to you. And I had my revenge upon him at last, for I drove him to suicide. Ha! ha! that was some consolation. Ah, I made him suffer, though not a thousandth part of what he merited! I followed you from England to this country, my child, a difficult task, which nothing but a father's doting love could have accomplished. Here I fell in with the body of brave and injured men who are bound by the most solemn vows to restore their beloved land to her former glory and prosperity. This cannot be done if the wretched and brutal slaves are taught to consider themselves equal to their rightful owners. The Southern gentlemen cannot, in justice to themselves, permit these creatures to be taught, and therefore they resolved to frighten away the teachers whom the bigoted tyrants of the North had sent here. I joined the band who attacked the house where you live, with the sole object of protecting you from violence. Full of this sacred purpose, I was in the foremost rank, and was shot, as you know. And here I lie, unable to escape, though I am now exposed to still greater danger. I have secret enemies, who seek my life, and may come here at any time and assassinate me while I lie helpless on my bed of suffering. I have not the means of making my escape, and therefore, my child, my

Winifred, I sent for you, to tell you all and throw myself on your mercy. Bring me that case of jewels. I will dispose of them for you, and transmit the proceeds to you, only keeping enough to pay my expenses back to Europe. There is no time for delay; bring them back to-night, or it may be too late."

"Do you not, then, believe that you are dying, as you said you were?" demanded Freddie, in a solemn tone.

"My life is in danger with every moment's delay," he replied, "and I said I was dying to bring you here. I could not tell that slave I was your father."

"Why have you never before made yourself known to your only child?" she asked again, in the same tone.

"I could not bring myself to let you see the miserable wreck of your once magnificently handsome father," he replied; "but I have watched over thee, my Winifred! I have watched over thee, like a guardian angel!"

He put out his hand to caress her, but she drew back with a shudder.

"You will fetch me the jewels, my darling, will you not?" he said, with a hypocritical whine.

Freddie could not trust herself to speak. She was burning to denounce him as a liar and murderer, but prudence kept her silent; and, ere she could frame any more moderate and temporizing sentence, their conference was rudely interrupted by the entrance of four masked figures.

"Quit the room," said the foremost of the visitors

to Freddie, whom he probably mistook for a nurse, "we have business with your patient."

Freddie required no second bidding. She hastened out. No light was visible. In the front yard she could hear (for it was too dark to see) the snorting and panting of several horses. No one was stirring within. Mrs. Benson seemed to have abandoned the place to the masked visitors.

Freddie groped along by the wall, and came to a door which stood partly open. She pushed it and went in. The sound of voices warned her that she was in a room adjoining that in which Captain Grainger lay, and separated from it only by a thin wooden partition. Cautiously she drew near and listened.

"You must decide upon our offer at once," said the stern voice of the man who had ordered her out of the room; "there is a carriage at the door, which will convey you safely, and with as little suffering as circumstances will permit, to North Carolina."

"For God's sake, gentlemen," replied Captain Grainger, "consider my condition! It would kill me to be removed for a day or two at least."

"We can consider nothing but our own safety. You must be out of this State before to-morrow night."

"Give me only one day; give me only till to-morrow morning!" pleaded the wounded man.

"We cannot give you an hour. Agree to go at once, or take the consequences."

"What consequences? What do you mean? You

are all my good friends; you would not harm me, I am sure."

"Have you so soon forgotten your oath?"

"No, no; I have been true to you all. I have kept the oath."

"Liar," said the masked leader, with suppressed fury, "you have promised to betray us, if your own miserable life is spared!"

"Upon my honor—upon my soul—gentlemen—"

"Have you forgotten that the penalty for breaking the oath is death—*death*—DEATH?"

"Gentlemen, think what you are doing," shrieked the wretched man. "For God's sake! For mercy's sake, don't murder me!"

In the midst of these entreaties, the stern voice said, "Gentlemen, are you prepared? One,—two,—three!"

At the last word, the report of several pistols was heard. There was a deep groan, the sound of retreating footsteps, horses' hoofs and the wheels of a carriage rattling for a moment along the road, and then a dead stillness.

Horror-stricken and heart-sick, Freddie staggered out. She must *see* with her own eyes that Freda's persecutor was really dead; she must, if possible, take possession of his papers, which might be of importance to her friend.

The smoky lamp was still burning. The ghastly corpse was already stiffening.

A pocket-book lay beside the pillow, containing money and papers. She pushed the money beneath

the pillow, and put the book into her pocket. Out, then, through the silent house, which seemed to be abandoned by every living thing.

Where was the man who had charge of Sultan? She tried to call him, but her voice failed her. She looked out into the yard. Not a glimmer of light was visible from the cabins of the negroes. Doubtless they were all hiding from the dreaded Ku-Klux, as a brood of chickens hide from a hawk. The stillness was so death-like that her own footsteps almost frightened her.

They were heard by other ears, however, which they did not frighten. A gentle whinny told her that Sultan was in the yard, and the noble creature walked up to her. The man had run away and hidden himself, without stopping even to secure the horse.

Full of gratitude to the sagacious creature who had been so true to her, she mounted, and gave him the rein, whispering, "Now, my Sultan, take me home, for I know nothing of the way."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE INDIAN BOW.

THE gallant horse bore his young mistress safely home.

In strange contrast to the silent abode of death which she had so recently quitted, the cabins and yard at Miss Fanny's were alive with bright lights and busy people. A marriage had taken place in the little community that evening, and a "big supper" had been got up, in honor of the event.

Miss Fanny would have refused, as an insult, an invitation to the table of a "nigger,"—but she was so anxiously looking out for a plateful of turkey and other good things which she expected would be sent to her *from* their table, that Freddie, after confiding Sultan to the boy who acted as ostler, passed her without question or interruption, on her way to Freda's room.

"I have been so uneasy about you, dear!" cried the latter, starting up to welcome her. "What has detained you so long? And what has happened? Something dreadful, I fear, to make you look so pale! What about that man—that Captain Grainger? What did he want?"

"He is dead, Freda," replied Freddie, "don't ask me any questions about it, please. It was very shocking, and I cannot bear to think of it. Some other time I will tell you. Has anything happened while I was away?"

"Here is another letter from our friend. That honest fellow, Dan Fletcher, brought it, and is waiting for an answer. He says the gentleman who wrote it has been living for nearly two weeks at Sam Watson's, nursing him like a brother. Sam broke his leg in escaping from a party of Ku-Klux ruffians, and this gentleman set it. He says Sam Watson knew him years ago."

"He is the man I supposed, then, and we may trust him implicitly, I am sure of that. What does he say?"

She took the letter and read:

"The bearer of this is known to you as an honest and trustworthy man. He will give you Sam Watson's assurance that all is on the square. Dan will take your horses secretly to Watson's, where they can remain in safety till sent for. He will also take your baggage to the depot in the morning. *Wait for nothing.* Money is provided."

"What shall we do?" asked Freda.

"Go—go—by all means. I wish we could set off to-night instead of waiting till morning, for I so dread being called as a witness at the inquest on that man. Let us send off the horses at once. It will be such a comfort to know that the dear creatures are safe. I love my Sultan better than ever

after this night. He brought me home in the dark, when I could not have found the road."

They bade an affectionate farewell to their dumb friends, and wished Dan to take some money to Watson, to pay for their keep; but they could not induce him to receive a cent. He assured them repeatedly that it was all "done settled, and done paid for" already.

"We must be patient, I suppose, till we get to California," said Freda, "and then, I hope, everything will be explained."

The stable stood apart from all the other buildings, and thus the horses were saddled and led away without attracting the attention of the good folks who were intent upon the supper, and the dance that was to follow it.

Freda was so tired with the last night's vigil that she went to bed, declaring that the noise would not disturb her slumbers, especially as the number of men assembled at the wedding would assure them against another midnight attack of the "Chivalry."

Freddie left her to her repose, but her own mind was too much agitated to allow her even to seek her pillow. The cold-blooded murder of the wounded and helpless wretch, which she had all but witnessed, thrilled her with horror. The death of twenty, or any number of men, slain in fair fight, would not have produced such a painful effect upon her. He was an unmitigated scoundrel, no doubt, and he had just before been telling her any number of lies; his life was worthless, and Freda's was more secure now

that he was gone; but to be shot like a dog, while he lay helpless in his bed, and by those who had but yesterday been his friends and familiar companions—it was too revolting. Then there was the question—could it be possible that he was Freda's father? Much that he had said was, she knew, untrue, and this relationship might only have been assumed in order to grasp her jewels by working on her filial duty. Ought she to tell Freda what had passed? It was her right to know it all, and she was old enough to judge for herself. Still it would be merciful to withhold such knowledge; but would she be justified in doing so? These confused thoughts racked her brain; but she could arrive at no conclusion except that she would wait till they arrived in California, where possibly something might take place that would throw a new light upon everything, and make the path of duty plain before her.

She extinguished her lamp, and opening a window sat down before it, trying to cool her heated brow in the sharp frosty air.

This window was situated in the gable end of the house, and looked towards the stable, consequently in a direction at right angles with the noisy yard.

As she sat, gazing out into the obscurity of the starless and moonless night, a sound fell upon her ears, unheeded at first; but which gradually aroused, and finally riveted her attention. It came from the direction of the stable, and at first seemed to be an echo of the noise made by the dancers, for it kept

time, stroke for stroke, to the thumping of their feet. But it was a different kind of sound, more like a hammer striking on something of a yielding nature, like a wooden peg. She watched and listened; curious, but not uneasy, for the horses were not there.

Suddenly a gleam of light fell on the stable door, and revealed a man in the act of setting fire to a heap of litter. The first attempt failed, and another match was struck. As the man stooped to blow the smouldering rubbish into a flame, Freddie had a good view of his face. It was one that she knew well by sight, and the recognition revealed to her, like a flash of lightning, the object of his present manœuvres. It was that of Harding—the chivalrous *gentleman* who had sent her, as he thought, an incurably vicious horse, in the hope that it would kill her; and who now, finding that design frustrated, was, in the utter malignity of his heart, attempting to burn the horse in his stable.

Freddie, at that moment, knew what it was to feel blood-thirsty.

Her hand was on her revolver; but she withdrew it, as another idea crossed her mind. Quick as thought she tumbled the contents of her large trunk upon the floor, raised the false bottom, and seized her bow and arrows.

A sense of conscious power thrilled her nerves as, with the same ease as of old, she strung the mighty weapon—a feat which many a strong man had attempted in vain to achieve.

"If my eye and hand are still true," she said,

fitting an arrow to the string; "and if my arrow is not warped, I'll give him a stinger, and he shall not know where it comes from."

The fire was now thoroughly kindled. The brute had pushed the burning straw and pine chips under the broken door, and the interior of the stable was lighted up. She saw him apply his eye to a crevice, as if to gloat over his victim's agony.

At that moment the arrow sped, true to its mark.

A yell of pain followed, and she saw the wretch writhing and twisting, yet not running away, though the flames had swept out beneath the door, and were lapping like waves around his feet and legs.

His shoulder was pinned to the door! The pain of the burning, however, gave him strength. By a powerful effort he broke away, beat out the flames from his clothes, and scrambled over the fence. His horse's feet, at full gallop along the hard road, soon told that he was beating a hasty retreat.

"That's what may be called a very neat little bit of business," said Freddie, putting away her Indian weapons. "I wonder whether he had time to see that the stable was empty! I hope he had. It would be such a pleasant subject for reflection."

Before the fire was discovered, the stable was totally demolished. Miss Fanny bitterly bewailed the loss of her property. Freddie and Freda pretended the deepest concern at the destruction of their horses, a report which they allowed to pass uncontradicted, seeing how much the belief in it would add to the security of the animals.

Even the merciful Freda could not but be glad of the ruffian's punishment, when an inspection of the ruin showed the pains he had taken to accomplish his diabolical purpose.

One of the door posts and a portion of the door had fallen outwards, and thus escaped complete destruction. The door was firmly nailed to the post, and beneath it lay a hammer and a piece of thick leather, much indented by nail heads, which had probably been used to deaden the noise made by hammering in the nails.

Freddie chuckled as she pointed out the head of the arrow still sticking in the door, held there by the barb.

"That arrow was shot with a good will, and by a strong arm, whoever did it," she remarked, as they walked away.

"If it were not for your sake, dear Freddie," said Freda, "I could wish you had sent another after it. He richly deserved it—the *monster!*"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A JOURNEY.

"So you're going away, are you?" was Miss Fanny's greeting.

"Yes, Miss Fanny," replied Freda, "we don't like being shot."

"Well—I reckon there wasn't much danger of *you* being shot. Nobody would think it worth while to shoot *you*. You needn't have been so frightened of a parcel of young fellows that were out on a spree."

"It's a kind of spree that has not much fun in it," said Freddie.

"It wasn't much fun for the poor chap that got killed, any way," said Miss Fanny.

"Have you heard that he is dead?" asked Freddie, dreading that the next thing mentioned would be the inquest.

"Yes—he's done died, and done buried," answered Miss Fanny, carelessly.

"*Buried!*" repeated Freddie, amazement at such indecent haste overcoming the sense of relief which the information afforded; "*buried* so soon, and without an inquest!"

"What's the good of bobbering about an inquest? They knew what the man died of. And nobody was acquainted with him, either. Seems he was a stranger."

"So they buried him in the potter's field," said Freddie, half mournfully, as she reflected that this obscure burial might have been given to her dear Freda's father.

"No, they put him in the white folk's symmetry," replied Miss Fanny; and the impulsive Freddie ran out to hide a laugh at this complacent piece of ignorance.

Dan Fletcher now appeared with a wagon, borrowed from Mr. Roy, whose repentance had stood the test of time. Dan was a tenant of Mr. Harding's.

"Seems there's Injins round some whar," he said, as he carried out the trunks; "Mas'r Harding was riding home from his brover's last night, and was shot right through his shoulder with an Injun arrow."

"Where does his brother live, Dan?" asked Freddie.

"Out yander, dat away, Miss Winifred," replied Dan, indicating an extent of about ten miles of horizon by a comprehensive sweep of his hand.

"That's a wide place to live in, Dan," she said; "but Master Harding was not there when he was shot. He told a falsehood about that." Dan's eyes opened wide. "He was setting fire to Miss Fanny's stable, and I was the Indian who shot him."

"*You*, Miss Winifred!" cried Dan, bursting into

a grin of intense admiration; "and you seen him setting fire to the stable?"

"I saw him; and, as I had an Indian bow and arrow, I shot him."

"Now, dat's curus," said Dan; "he jest wanted to kill dat hos. When he seen you riding past dat time wif de hos jest as quiet as a child, I tell you he *was* mad! He swore, and took de name of de blessed Lord in vain, till he done freezed my blood. But to come and try to burn de poor dumb beast was de meanest thing ever I heard of."

"Everybody about here supposes the horses were burnt to ashes," said Freddie, "and you must take care not to let them know any better. When they are safe away, you may tell the tale and have a good laugh over it."

"You may trust me, Miss Winifred; *I* wont tell nobody."

The young ladies timed their arrival at the depot, so that they were not compelled to wait long under the insulting gaze of the white men who were lounging about as usual.

Freddie looked eagerly round through her thick veil, hoping to see the tall form of the friend who had promised to guard them on their journey; but he was nowhere visible.

The cars moved off, and she sank back in her seat, silent and downcast.

A few miles further, as they were slowly ascending a steep gradient, Freddie suddenly clutched Freda's hand, exclaiming, "There he is!"

Freda also had caught a glimpse of a tall man, standing by the track. She put her head out of the window in a moment. "He is on the cars," she said, as she withdrew it, "I saw him run by the side a few steps, and put his gun on the platform, and then he jumped on. I feel so safe now."

"So do I," said Freddie, and lapsed again into silence; but her heart was no longer downcast.

It was in vain that they looked for their protector to enter the car where they were. He remained invisible; and Freddie questioned her companion closely, several times, as to whether she was *quite sure* she had seen him spring upon the platform. Sympathetic Freda bore with angelic patience these repeated doubts of the reliability of her eyes. And still their evidence remained unconfirmed.

It was not till they reached Columbia that their minds were set at rest.

"Ladies," said the conductor, "a train goes your way in twenty minutes. You've just got time to reach the other depot. Come this way, and I'll put you into a carriage."

"Our baggage!" suggested Freda, as she followed him.

"All right, madam. That is seen to. You'll have your checks on the other train."

Freddie had given no thought to the baggage. She was looking in all directions for their protector; but with no better success than before.

The second train had not long started when the conductor entered the car, and after carefully eying

the passengers, approached our two heroines, and respectfully inquired if one of them was named Trevanian. Both eagerly answered "yes,"—whereupon he presented them with checks for their baggage, and tickets for some place of which they had never heard.

"You will have to travel all night, ladies," he added, "and all day to-morrow; and then you can have a night's rest."

Having said this he passed on, "staying no farther question."

This was a fair sample of the way in which their long and fatiguing journey was accomplished. Whenever it was practicable they rested for the night; every care was taken off their hands; every want or wish was, as far as possible, forestalled. Yet they felt that their position was a very anomalous one, and desired to come to an explanation with their unknown protector. It was in vain, however, that they endeavored to obtain an interview with him, by every means short of taking the conductors into their counsels.

When they started on this journey, acting on the advice, and tacitly accepting the guardianship of the unknown, they did so under the pressure of imminent danger, but certainly not with the intention of proceeding to the far West without coming to an explicit understanding of his motives for urging them to go there. Yet here they were, completely carried away by the tide of circumstances, unable even to remonstrate without compromising their

own dignity, and in a manner compelled to go on under the direction of their singular guide, as that seemed the only way they would have of repaying him the cost of their journey.

San Francisco! The journey was at an end. It was night when they arrived. For an instant, Freddie felt a feeling of alarm. Why should two young girls be brought thus mysteriously into the midst of this wicked and dissolute city? Then in imagination she felt a hand upon her head, and a murmured benediction fell upon her ears, and she blushed at her own evil thought.

A carriage took them to a quiet hotel. Here they were received with the utmost respect. Every comfort was ready for them, and when she bade them good-night, the chamber-maid recommended them to take a long night's sleep, as the carriage was not ordered for them till ten o'clock.

"Shall we refuse to go in that carriage till we know where we are going?" asked Freddie.

"It is too late to begin a rebellion now," answered Freda, "we shall surely have this strange business cleared up to-morrow. We should only cause delay by refusing to go on."

"That's logical!" laughed Freddie.

"Then don't talk to me. How can I be logical when I am so sleepy?" murmured Freda, as her eye-lids closed over her weary eyes.

CHAPTER XXX.

DISCOVERIES.

In the early dawn, Gilbert Bracebridge rode away from the hotel, while the two girls, unconscious of the error under which he labored, and which a single word might have rectified, were still enjoying their much-needed repose.

He rode slowly and sadly. His task was well nigh accomplished. A few words of explanation with Rupert Forester, and all would be over. No harm could come to the girls during their drive from San Francisco; he would be gone before their arrival, and so escape the shame of breathing the same air with her whom he still so wildly loved.

Yes,—there was no disguising the fact from himself,—he loved her still. The struggle to subdue this feeling was well-nigh killing him. During the whole of that terrible journey he had carried on a mental warfare which only his iron frame could have supported without sinking under the load. In his waking hours he could command his ideas, and compelled himself to think, calmly, of an abstract being who was his sister's child, and whom it was his duty to convoy to a place of safety—to a husband who

was worthy of her. This abstraction, it is true, never presented herself to his mental vision under the form of Freddie. Had she done so, he could hardly have viewed her so coolly.

Such was the tenor of his waking thoughts; but no sooner did sleep close his eyelids, though but for a moment, than Freddie was his niece no longer. She was the girl he loved, and imagination ran riot in inventing the wildest adventures in which they were both engaged; he always protecting her from danger, and meeting his reward in a look of gratitude. Then he would gaze into her clear eyes, and see the tears well up from their grey depths, and the light of a dawning love shining through the haze, and with a shudder he would wake, and face the stern reality.

To escape what he considered the criminality of these dreams, he tried to abstain from sleeping. But, in spite of all, sleep sometimes seized him, and was revenged.

The result of this continued struggle was, that he was a very worn and wearied man when he alighted at the house where he had left Rupert.

To his great chagrin, the latter was from home. He had gone out shooting directly after breakfast, the mistress of the house informed him, but she guessed he would return before long, for he never stayed out many hours at a time. He was always looking for his friend's return.

In ordering the carriage for ten o'clock, Gilbert had allowed a wide margin for contingencies. He

was four good hours in advance of his niece and her companion, and could afford to wait.

He strolled out into the garden. The air was soft and balmy, and many early flowers were shedding their fragrance around. He lay down on a rustic seat, and listened to the songs of the birds and the humming of the bees. His pulses were tranquil, but it was from the lassitude of exhaustion. His mind was calm, but it was the calmness of despair.

He had not lain on the bench two minutes before he was in a deep and dreamless sleep.

Meanwhile Fate, in the form of a boy, was preparing a little *contre-temps* for him.

The youth who had been appointed to drive the carriage for Freda and Freddie was very anxious to be off before an older and steadier driver, who was absent on a journey, should return and deprive him of the job. Therefore, when he saw the young ladies walking about, soon after eight o'clock he approached them with a well-assumed air of rustic stupidity, and asked whether it was nine o'clock or ten that the vehicle was to be ready.

"We are ready now," said Freda, "let us go at once. It will be pleasanter than waiting here."

Freddie agreed, and the boy, as may be supposed, lost no time in getting the carriage ready.

Thus it happened that just as Rupert had received the welcome intelligence of Gilbert's arrival, and was about to seek him in the garden, a carriage drew up, and two ladies sprang out and advanced towards him with outstretched hands.

"*This*, then, is the surprise that was prepared for us!" cried Freddie, for Freda was too much agitated to speak, and Rupert, too, could only clasp their hands in silence. "And where," she continued, glancing round, "where is the gentleman who brought us here?"

"Yes, Gilbert, where is he?" said Rupert Forester, like one just awaking from a trance, and glad to seize hold of a tangible idea; "he must explain all this. I am bewildered. Let me retain your hands, dear ladies, or I shall expect to see you vanish as suddenly as you appeared."

"Did you not know that we were coming?" asked Freddie.

"No, nor dared to hope it in my wildest dreams," he replied; "but where is Gilbert Bracebridge? He alone can throw a light on this delightful mystery."

The name of Bracebridge suggested another idea.

"O Freda!" he exclaimed, stopping short as they were entering the garden, "were you not delighted to find your uncle?"

"My uncle!" repeated Freda, as much mystified as himself, "what do you mean? I have no uncle that I know of."

"Yes—Gilbert Bracebridge—your mother's brother. Did he not tell you?"

"I know no one of that name," said poor Freda, ready to cry with mingled grief and fear, for she supposed her beloved Rupert must be insane.

"Then, in the name of wonder," he said, dropping their hands, "how did you come here? Who pre-

pared for you the surprise you spoke of? Who brought you here, if it was not Gilbert Bracebridge?"

"We were brought here," said Freddie, whose heart was now beating so wildly that she could scarcely command her voice, "by a mysterious being whose name we never heard, who concealed himself from us during the journey, and who, unless I am much mistaken, lies sleeping yonder!"

Rupert took their hands again, and they crossed the lawn together to the bench where Gilbert lay.

"Yes," said Rupert, "that is Gilbert Bracebridge; and he, dear Freda, is your uncle, your mother's only brother."

"My uncle!" she repeated, in accents of dove-like tenderness. "I remember, now, having heard my mother speak of him. And it was my own uncle who saved us from those dreadful men!"

Freddie was wonderfully sobered down all at once. She had "laid the flattering unction to her soul" that all that Gilbert had done was for *her* sake. But it now occurred to her that she had been an egotistic fool. It was his niece, concerning whose safety he was so solicitous, and *she* was but thrown in as a make-weight. Still there was some consolation in the fact that Freda *was* his niece.

Freda's last words elicited a question from Rupert respecting the danger from which Gilbert had delivered them; which Freddie's recovered self-possession enabled her to answer by a succinct narration of all that had occurred since the visit that Rupert

had paid to Mrs. Templeman's for the purpose of leaving Winifred's jewels in her hands.

But the more all this was explained, the less could any of them comprehend the motives of Gilbert's behavior.

They talked without restraint as they stood around the sleeper, for they wished him to awake, yet would not actually rouse him. They commented on his worn appearance; and Freda admired his manly style of beauty, and growing familiar with him as she realized their relationship, gradually drew nearer to him.

Like the hum of the bees which had lulled him as he fell asleep, the sound of their voices came in a confused murmur upon Gilbert's senses. Then words and sentences shaped themselves into form, without conveying any special meaning, though ever becoming more and more connected and distinct.

"Poor fellow! How pale and thin he has become! I think he must have been ill since he went from hence."

It was Rupert who said this,—Gilbert recognized his voice.

"He is my uncle, you know," said a young fresh female voice; "would it be very improper to wake him with a kiss?"

"No, no, no!" Gilbert almost shrieked,—throwing out his arms to repel her, and struggling to free himself from sleep. "Rupert! Hold her back! She must not!"

Bursting the bonds of slumber, he started up and

found himself face to face with Rupert, and a young lady, of whom, beautiful as she was, he had only a dim recollection. Freddie was standing behind him, and consequently out of sight.

"Let me go," he said, in a hoarse voice; "where is *she?* I must not meet her."

"Are you mad, Gilbert?" said his friend, seizing him by the arm; "you shall not stir till you have explained your whimsical conduct."

"Dear uncle!" said Freda, taking his other hand in both her own, "what have I done that you will not speak to me?"

"*You!*" he exclaimed, "are *you* my sister's child?"

"I am Winifred Trevanian," she replied; and her ready tact, divining in a moment the mistake he had been under, she added, "and my friend is a Winifred also. Let me introduce you to Miss Winifred Wilson. After taking so much care of us, and preparing this delightful surprise, you must not remain strangers."

But Gilbert did not yield to her attempt to draw him towards Freddie, whom he had seen, out of the corner of his eye, trying to look like an unconcerned spectator, and failing therein most ludicrously.

"Tell me, Rupert!" he exclaimed, in breathless amazement and delight, "is *this* girl my niece? Is *this* my sister Ellen's daughter? Is *she* your Winifred?"

He held Freda at arm's length while he spoke, scanning her features with eager eyes.

"She is your sister's child, without a doubt,"

replied Rupert, "and she is the only Winifred of whom I have any knowledge, though I saw Miss Wilson, who, it seems, is also a Winifred, for a few moments at Mrs. Templeman's."

"Dear child!" said Gilbert, folding her in his arms, and kissing her tenderly. "I did not know that I had such a sweet young relative till a few months ago, when Rupert told me."

"Then, my dear uncle, why were you so surprised to see me?" demanded Freda, with an air of so much innocent *naïveté*, that no one but Freddie suspected the duplicity that lay beneath it.

"I—I," stammered Gilbert, blushing like a girl through his sun-burnt skin,—"don't you ladies find the sun unpleasantly warm? You'll be tired, too, with standing so long. Let us go into the arbor."

His exultation at eluding Freda's inconvenient question by this brilliant piece of strategy was so manifest, that Freddie turned away her head to hide a smile.

"Yes, by all means, let us go into the arbor," said Rupert, with nervous eagerness.

This arbor was simply an arched trellis, overgrown with vines and climbing plants, which afforded a delightful shade, though the foliage was not, as yet, very luxuriant; but neither were the sun's rays so fierce as to drive them to seek its shelter, had not Freda's question compelled her uncle to make the discovery.

The little retreat was furnished with seats, and a small table.

Freda clung to Gilbert's arm, as they moved towards the arbor.

Rupert followed, nervous and unsettled, but with his eyes fixed sadly on the graceful figure before him.

Freddie felt as if she belonged to nobody, and now Freda was taken away from her, nobody belonged to her; so she walked in first with a very independent air, and an uncomfortable lump in her throat, and sat down on an isolated seat at the back of the arbor.

Freda and Gilbert took possession of a settee that was just large enough for two; and Rupert seemed to emulate Freddie in keeping as far from any one else as the narrow limits of the arbor permitted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EXPLANATIONS.

WITH all his care and trouble, Gilbert had only succeeded in bringing a very inharmonious party together.

For his own part, overjoyed as he was to learn that Freddie was not his niece, the reaction was almost too much for him, following upon such a long period of mental agony. Then he shrank from an explanation of his strange conduct on the journey, and while he was so near them in South Carolina, which must, he imagined, expose to all of them the crime of which he had believed himself to be guilty. Another reflection troubled him,—would Freddie ever be induced to look upon him with any other feelings than loathing and detestation when she learnt that, believing her to be his sister's daughter, he had not been able to cease loving her? Did she not, even now, hold herself aloof, as though his mere presence brought contamination with it? Why should she behave so, unless she had detected the disgraceful fact? As for attempting to hide from her a thought, a feeling, or an act for the purpose of putting a better coloring on his own short-

comings, Gilbert Bracebridge was too honest and straightforward even to dream of attaining happiness by such crooked ways.

Rupert, when the first effervescence of delight at seeing Freda had subsided, saw before him, in tenfold magnitude, all the impediments which would prevent his ever asking her to be his wife. First, there was his poverty. He had been to the gold diggings, and had lost the little money he brought with him. He had no prospect but that of laboring, either with hands or brain, for his daily bread. Was that a lot which he could ask that delicately nurtured girl to share with him? Had he been a younger man, it might have been otherwise; but his age (he was forty-three, poor fellow!) besides rendering it the height of presumption in him to woo so young and beautiful a creature, made him less facile in adapting himself to new modes of life, as he had found to his cost when thrown among a set of rude and illiterate miners. Gilbert had been under some mistake about her, but he could not stop to inquire what, for every faculty of his soul was strained to discover some way out of the fearful dilemma in which he found himself.

Freddie had her own causes of discomfort. She felt mortified and humiliated as she recalled the confidence with which she had appropriated to herself the interest with which Gilbert had watched over them on the journey. So far from this being the case, she now thought, perhaps it was *her* presence that had prevented his coming near Freda all the

time! She had been so immodest as to betray her love for him, though she knew not how nor when—but then suddenly there flashed across her mind his undisguised astonishment and delight when Freda addressed him as her uncle, and poor Freddie's heart beat wildly, and she hung her head, to conceal her blushes, and cast one timid glance towards Gilbert. But the blushes soon vanished, when she saw that his eyes were fixed upon Freda, and she remembered, with painful acuteness, how he had avoided an introduction to her. She wished she was dead! Or in the middle of a desert, with no one but Sultan!

Even Freda had her sources of disquietude. This new-found uncle was truly a tower of strength, and gave her, to a great extent, the command of the situation. It was gratifying to find she had a blood relation, after being so long alone in the world, yet at the present moment she valued him chiefly as a means of arresting the future flights of the truant Rupert, and possibly of removing the secret sorrow which oppressed him. For herself, to act in this would be impossible. The change that had come over him, after the first burst of delight on recognizing her, was too palpable to be misunderstood. Should he announce his determination to wander off again to the uttermost confines of the earth, *she* could do nothing to prevent it; but Gilbert might. And it was for this that she chiefly valued Gilbert.

It has taken some time to describe thus minutely the state of mind and feeling of these four people.

But it must be remembered that mental processes take place with great rapidity; and as all the four brains were acting simultaneously, the time actually consumed was only that which was occupied by their taking their seats, and a silence of a few moments' duration which then ensued.

It was a singular situation. It needed but a little more estrangement, a little more doubt, a little more diffidence, a little more self-condemnation, for these lovers to part, and each go on their separate ways, alone through life.

Like a chemical mixture, the ingredients of which refuse to coalesce until a few drops of some other element bring them into harmonious combination, they remained apart, until Gilbert, throwing aside his own troubles, and thinking only of his friend, stirred a few drops of unselfish sympathy into the hitherto incongruous mass of thought and feeling, and wrought a magical change.

"My friend," he said, addressing Rupert, "I see that you have a burthen on your mind. It is probably somewhat that you think my niece ought to know."

"Why should I burthen her young soul with my sorrows?" said Rupert, despondingly.

"Because she has a right to hear them," replied Gilbert. "Now, tell me frankly—shall I, as her uncle, be present at this conference, to give her my counsel, if needful; or shall I leave you to yourselves? Shall Miss Wilson go, or stay?"

"I wish her to remain," said Freda.

"And you, Gilbert, know all mine; and furthermore, you know a great part of my sad history. Remain, therefore, and Miss Wilson likewise; and tell your niece all that she ought to know about me. I will listen, and if your memory deceives you, I will set you right. Only spare my mother's name, and the title that she bore. Call her simply the Countess."

"His mother, my dear Freda," Gilbert immediately began, "belonged to a noble family. She loved the younger son of a race quite equal to her own, but he was not wealthy, and her relatives opposed the match, and forced her to marry an old and almost imbecile man for his title and estates. It is a sad story, but not without precedent where girls are compelled to marry contrary to their inclinations. Her lover became the friend of the family, and—and—well—he was the father of all her children. Rupert was the youngest. The rest were girls, who married well when they grew up. Rupert, when little more than a boy, fell in love with a beautiful girl whom his mother had adopted. The Countess, knowing by experience the misery of a crossed affection, gave her consent to their marriage; but it seems that she had not been as thoughtful for the young lady as for her son, for on the very eve of the wedding-day, the bride disappeared, no one knew whither, nor with whom. The Countess' lover, who was in the army, fell, bravely fighting, in the celebrated cavalry charge at Balaklava. The Countess, true to her first and only love, sickened and died of

grief. But, before she died, she confided the whole truth to her son, no doubt supposing that he would be prouder to be the son of such a brave and noble man than of the drivelling, half-idiotic old man whom he had been accustomed to call father."

"No, Gilbert, I never called him so," said Rupert; "my sisters did, but to me he was always 'Your Lordship,' and 'the Earl.'"

"But our dear Rupert has a very tender conscience," continued Gilbert, "and from the moment when the death of the old Earl put him in possession of the title and estates, he felt that he was defrauding the rightful heir, and was constantly devising plans for restoring all to him without blackening his mother's fame, or injuring his sisters. The heir was still a boy, however, so there was no need to hurry; and meantime, Rupert was a faithful steward of the estates, and lived a life so retired that he took little from the property beyond the wages of a steward."

Freda had cast many a glance of loving compassion upon Rupert, as he sat with his face buried in his hands; but now she rose and sat beside him, with a glow of enthusiastic admiration on her lovely face.

Her uncle smiled his approbation, and went on.

"Yes, for conscience' sake, he submitted to let the world call him a madman and a miser, while he was simply a hero. Another duty soon claimed him. He discovered that the object of his boyish love was living in France, in great poverty. He went to her aid and —"

"Gilbert, let me speak now," said Rupert, rising.

"You remember that night, Freda, when your house was burnt. You know something of what happened. I followed that man and shot him. Not in cold blood, but to obtain from him the key, and save your life. Freda, I love you—I have loved you for years—but, can you give your heart to the man who shed your father's blood, cruel and unnatural though that father was?"

"Stop," cried Freddie, suddenly; "had you certain proof of his death? Did you see him, dead?"

"I did not; but I was told that he survived only a short time."

"Did Captain Grainger tell you that?" asked Freddie; "but, no matter. I must tell you all I know, and you will, I hope, be able to sift out the truth."

Then she narrated, almost literally, all that had been said by the wounded Ku-Klux, and produced the pocket-book, which, on examination, contained abundant proofs that Captain Grainger and Randolph Trevanian were identical.

As she proceeded, Freda shrank downwards, till she seemed to have collapsed into a heap. But when Freddie had ended, she rose up, dignified and calm. Her face was very pale, but it wore an expression of high and holy resolution which seemed more than human. Her companions looked at her in mute reverence, for, in its intensified beauty, her face was as the face of an angel.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FREDA'S VOW.

"OH, RUPERT!" said Freda, in a low but distinct tone, as she placed both her hands in his, and looked in his face with an expression of mingled love, compassion, and inflexible resolution, "a little while ago my highest hope was that I might hear you say you loved me; for I am not ashamed to own, in the presence of my one dear friend, and of my uncle, who is to you like a brother, that I have loved you for many years."

"Then why do your looks assure me that you have resolved to refuse me?" exclaimed Rupert, passionately. "Yet, why need I ask? I am punished for my mother's fault."

"Not so, dear Rupert," continued Freda, with increasing tenderness of tone and manner; "it is not for your mother's fault (if the fault were hers), it is not because you aimed at my unworthy father's life, nor is it because your boyish love was given to my mother, that I tell you I must not be your wife."

"Oh, Freda! Do not be so cruel!" exclaimed Freddie.

"Winifred! What is this nonsense? Explain yourself," said Gilbert, angrily, while Rupert uttered a cry of despair.

"It is neither cruelty nor nonsense," replied Freda, turning towards them a face that was pale with suppressed anguish; "but obedience to what I know is right."

"Explain yourself," repeated Gilbert; then muttered between his teeth, "the girl is either a fool or mad!"

"And supposing that my father had been mad," said Freda, who had caught the drift of his words, "or that he was the victim of some dreadful hereditary disease, would it be right for his child to marry, at the risk, nay, with the certainty, of transmitting such evils to an unborn generation?"

"Rupert, what do you know of this?" said Gilbert, still frowning. "Was her father insane?"

"No!" exclaimed Rupert, catching eagerly at the hope this question suggested, "neither insane nor diseased. Freda, my beloved one, your fears are groundless. The disfigurement of his face proceeded from accident, and not, as you suppose, from disease."

"Alas!" sighed Freda, "is there no disease but that of the body? Was not his soul diseased, till it was one mass of crime and baseness?"

"Freda is right!" cried Freddie, starting up. "And you would pay dearly for a few years of happiness, were you to have such a son as Ernest Templeman."

"But Freda is all goodness," persisted Rupert.

"So was Mrs. Templeman," rejoined Freddie; "she was as good a woman as ever lived. Her husband was an honorable, upright man; but his father was a dissipated wretch, a gambler, a duellist, and everything that is vile and dishonorable. His grandson inherited all his vices, and sent both his parents, prematurely, to their graves. Could you endure to see Freda the mother of such a son?"

"Freda, my poor child," said her uncle, drawing her towards him, and pillowing her pale cheek upon his breast, "the course you have determined upon is the right one. I have myself known cases where similar sense and firmness would have saved an immense amount of wretchedness; and yet, in not one instance, was the apparent danger so great as in yours."

"Are you too against me, Gilbert? Then I have no longer a hope, nor a friend!"

As Rupert said this, he flung himself on a seat, and sobbed wildly and bitterly.

Freda struggled to leave her uncle's encircling arms, to go and console her unhappy lover; but Gilbert restrained her when he saw that Freddie had started forward and was whispering to him.

"Let her talk to him," he said; "her words are sure to do him good."

All that Freddie said was, "Oh, Mr. Forester, can you not control your emotions? Don't you see that she suffers more than you?"

This appeal to Rupert's noble nature was not

made in vain. After a brief mental struggle, he raised his pallid face, still quivering from the effects of the past tempest, and said, "Freda, you are right; and I will loyally abide by your decision. My life has hitherto been one long sacrifice to what I held to be my duty, and so it must continue."

"A sacrifice to duty brings its own reward," said Freda; "thank you, dear love, for supporting me in mine."

As she said this, she impressed a kiss upon her lover's marble brow.

"On my lips, Freda," he whispered, imploringly, "only this once."

"Not once only, dear Rupert," said she, sweetly complying, with a wife-like dignity, "it would be foolish to deny ourselves such a harmless pleasure. In spirit, I am your wife."

"And I am happier in having such a wife, even on those terms, than to be wedded to a less perfect creature in an earthly union," said Rupert, inspired by her enthusiasm.

"Be as contented as you can with your bad bargain," said Freda, "but don't spoil her by flattery. Now, let us talk of what we are going to do. Uncle, can we all live together?"

"I—I—hope so," replied Gilbert, with his eyes fixed on the ground. He felt very humble at that moment, and doubted much whether Freddie would ever consent to be the wife of such a criminal.

"Then, I propose that we join together, and buy a farm," said Freda, looking bright and happy,

though there was a dull aching pain at her heart all the time, that might be hidden, but could not be subdued.

"You are too hasty, Freda," said her uncle; "Miss Wilson may object to such an arrangement."

Had he looked up, he would have seen Freddie's eyes fixed on him, very wide open, and full of tears.

"I do not think Freddie will desert me in my happiness, after we have suffered so much together," replied Freda.

"*Happiness!*" sighed Rupert, derisively; "then I suppose Tantalus was happy."

"Shall we live apart, then, Rupert?"

"No, no; I am a thankless brute!" he exclaimed. "I will learn to bear my lot more patiently, my love. And, after all, it would be folly to dream of any other for some time to come; for, dearest Freda, I am little better than a pauper. You must, therefore, leave me out of your calculations. I cannot join you in purchasing a farm, but if you will employ me as a laborer—"

"What nonsense are you talking, Rupert," cried Freda, with vivacity, "are there not my famous jewels?"

"I have no claim on them," said he.

"You have exactly the same claim that I have. But they may not be worth quarrelling about," she added, with an attempt at a laugh; "what is their value?"

"I have no idea," he replied; "have you not shown them to a jeweller?"

"No, for I have not seen them myself," answered Freda; "you did not leave the key, and I would not have the box broken except in a case of dire necessity. That time has now arrived; so, if you will help me to unstrap my trunk, I will produce it, and uncle Gilbert will break it open."

"I can save him that trouble," said Rupert, taking from his neck the ribbon to which the little gold key was attached; "here is your key, my Freda. It was the only link that connected my old, false existence, as a sham Earl, with the newer and truer life of Rupert Forester."

"How singular!" cried Freda; "that is almost the same idea that occurred to Freddie. She said this little key would be a bond to draw us together again. Now, let us open this Pandora's box of mine, and see what mischief we can set loose from it."

"Do not call it a Pandora's box, love," said Rupert, as he left the arbor, with Freda on his arm, "for Hope was left at the bottom of that, and what hope is there for us?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FREDDIE'S CONFESSION.

It was not without design that Freda drew Rupert away from the arbor.

Poignant as was her own grief at being compelled by conscience to pronounce the fiat that must forever preclude her from becoming Rupert's wife, and deep as was her distress for her lover's suffering, she still felt sympathy for others, and generously desired to see them enjoying the happiness from which she was debarred.

She saw that both Freddie and Gilbert were embarrassed, and wisely concluded that they would be more likely to come to a mutual understanding if left alone, than if she or Rupert, with the best intentions in the world, were to attempt to clear the way for them. She knew that Freddie loved Gilbert; and entertained a shrewd guess at the blunder which, if Gilbert returned her love, would fully and naturally account for his apparently capricious conduct during and preceding the journey.

She did not confide her thoughts to Rupert, but talked to him cheerfully (though her own heart was sad enough) about the happiness of being

always together, and laid out many a plan for their future life; till Rupert, recalling the dreary prospect of a lonely life, which had been his only out-look but a few hours before, blamed himself for finding aught to complain of in his present lot.

Gilbert sat with his eyes fixed on the ground, trying to frame a sentence in which to address Freddie, and feeling that every minute passed in silence augmented the difficulty of speaking.

Freddie, after glancing round to see if there was any way of escaping from the arbor, and finding there was none except the regular entrance, through which she could not pass without brushing against her silent companion, determined to dash out of the very embarrassing silence, if she could not out of the arbor.

"Mr. Bracebridge," she said, in a composed and matter-of-fact tone.

Probably the report of a pistol in his ear would not have startled him so much as the sound of his name, spoken by her. He blushed, and turned pale by turns, stammered out a few incoherent words, and finally succeeded, by an inclination of his head, in making her understand that he was listening.

As might be expected, these symptoms of disquietude on his part, inspired her with fresh courage.

"When Freda proposed to buy a farm," she continued, "you appeared to have some objection to my joining in the enterprise, and—"

"*You!*" he exclaimed, interrupting her. "O Miss Wilson, what could induce you to think so?"

"I only judge from your own words and manner," she replied; "but at any rate, there are circumstances in my life with which you ought to be acquainted, before you give your sanction to a closer bond of intimacy between your niece and me."

"What *can* you mean? Freda knows and esteems you."

"Your superior knowledge of the world may induce you to view my errors in a different light from that which Freda's indulgent affection gives them," said Freddie, rejoicing to see how miserable he looked.

"I will *not* hear you say anything against yourself," said Gilbert; "what wrong can you have committed?"

"You *must* hear what I have to say," persisted Freddie; "many people would consider it a disgrace to associate with me."

"For God's sake, do not tell me!" he said, bowing his face upon his hands; "if Freda knows, that is enough. What am I, that you should tell your faults to me, if you have any? You may have committed some foolish action—but let it rest."

"It is of no use trying to dissuade me," she said, "you are Freda's uncle, and I am determined to tell you all that happened in my past life, which you might find objectionable in your niece's friend and companion."

Gilbert groaned, and said no more.

Freddie's heart beat violently, for she knew that to have been a Circus performer would stamp her in

the eyes of many a man as an outcast from all respectable society. Every word that he uttered, and his very reluctance to hear her confession, told her that he loved her, and made her the more anxious to put him in possession of her past history, before he could commit himself by any direct avowal, which would render it so much more painful for him to retract.

Having reduced him to silence, she dashed at once into her subject.

"When I was fifteen," she began, "I was cruelly treated at school, so I ran away and joined a travelling Circus. I staid with the company three years, performing in public all the time."

Her voice was choked with tears, and she was obliged to stop.

"Have you nothing worse than that to tell?" asked Gilbert, in a low voice that trembled with emotion.

"There are many other things, but that's the worst," said Freddie, humbly.

"It did you no harm, I am certain," he said, as, taking a deep breath, indicative of satisfaction, he leaned back in his seat, and watched her with a smile; "now, tell me some more of your horrors. They'll be amusing, to judge from the sample."

"I learned to play on the violin," said Freddie.

"Excellent! We shall have plenty of music."

"And I learned to shoot."

"Ho! Don't I know that?" he said, laughing; "and you can threaten to shoot your friends, too.

Well, that accomplishment may be serviceable in case we have rough neighbors. What's the next crime?"

"I learned to box," said Freddie, almost vexed at having thrown away her penitence on such an imperturbable being.

"Whew! That's formidable," ejaculated Gilbert, his eyes dancing with fun.

"And I know a great deal about horses, and how to tame them by Rarey's plan."

"Very useful, indeed," he said, with provoking seriousness, "I shall ask you to teach me."

"And I can turn somersaults," said Freddie, bent upon ruffling his equanimity.

"Not so useful, certainly; though highly amusing."

Freddie was furious, and threw her trump card, as she said, almost choking with shame and self-reproach: "I am *horribly* strong! Few men are so strong as I am. I am altogether dreadful and unwomanly!"

"Strength is a great blessing," he replied, calmly, "and appearances are often fallacious. You *look* like a very finely developed woman; but you may be, as you say, a Hercules in petticoats. Can you release your arm?"

He encircled her wrist lightly with his fingers as he said this.

A sneer of petulent defiance curled her lip, and she gave her arm a wrench that would have freed it instantly from the grasp of even a strong man. But Gilbert's hand seemed like a band of iron.

All the hardness and defiance and self-condemnation passed at once from her face, and a deep blush, and an air of humility overspread it.

"Have I lost my strength?" she whispered.

"No," he replied, "you have only found your master."

She looked up at him, just as she had done in the cottage, so long ago, and again their eyes met. But his gaze was no longer sorrowful. He was not, now, bound to leave her without a word of love. He knew, on the contrary, that if he spoke, his words would find the response that he desired. Yet he did exactly what he had done before. He laid his hand upon her head, and blessed her.

"Come!" said Gilbert, after a short silence, "let us see if those two people have found their box of treasure."

Freddie rose, and accompanied him without a word.

"Theirs is a sad lot," he continued, "and I feel that it would be selfish to enjoy our own happiness while their grief is yet so new. Do you not feel as I do,—Freddie?"

There was a loving lingering upon her name which he pronounced for the first time, that was not lost upon Freddie.

"Certainly I do," she replied, though hardly knowing what to say.

"You have confided to me all your little peccadilloes, or what you imagine to be such," said he, "but I have a confession of a much graver character

to make to you, when the time comes for speaking on another subject. But they are so inter-linked that they must both wait. I am somewhat hopeful of a favorable construction; for one, so ready to condemn herself for no faults at all, will not be a very severe censor of other people's sins."

They met Freda and Rupert coming from the house, bringing the little jewel case with them.

"Can you guess at the value of your possessions, Freda?" asked her uncle.

"No, we have not yet opened the box," she replied, "it is an affair that concerns us all, so we ought all to be present at the examination. We are going back to the arbor to investigate it,—so come along."

Freda walked on, leaning on Rupert's arm. Gilbert looked after them, and then drew Freddie's arm within his own.

"Ah! This hand!" he said, reverentially raising it to his lips, "how well I remember watching it, as it chafed and warmed the soiled feet of that poor outcast woman! Do *you* recollect that time, Freddie? Do you remember that we met once in England?"

"What a stupid question!" exclaimed Freddie.

"It's all right, then," said he, laughing softly. "I feared my vanity might have misled me."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE JEWEL CASE IS OPENED.

"BEFORE opening this box," said Rupert, when they were once more seated in the arbor, "my dear Freda wishes me to recount to her and her friend, Miss Wilson, the rest of my adventures up to our most unexpected meeting here this morning."

Gilbert would gladly have deferred this recital, dreading lest he too might be called upon to explain; but while he was seeking for an excuse, Rupert took up the thread of his story, and, avoiding any allusion to Captain Grainger, otherwise Randolph Trevanian, related briefly all the circumstances of his supposed death, and subsequent experiences during his departure from England, and his short and unsuccessful attempt at mining.

"Gilbert left me here to recruit my health and strength," he said in conclusion, "while he started on a mysterious expedition to New York. But if his departure was mysterious, his coming back was tenfold more so. Now I think we all have a right to demand an explanation of this conduct. It was natural enough to keep *me* in the dark, for the morbid feelings under which I then labored would probably

have sent me off on my wanderings again, before he could get back. But that he should affect all this mystery in his relations with you, Freda, is what I cannot, by any means, comprehend. Prisoner at the bar, what have you to say in your defence?"

Gilbert folded his arms on the table, and rested his forehead on them, thus effectually concealing his face from his inquisitor.

"It was all a confounded blunder," he said; "and now, oblige me by letting the subject drop."

"Your conduct also was most unaccountable, Freda," continued Rupert. "How came you to trust yourself to the care and guidance of an utter stranger?"

"He won our confidence by protecting us in a time of great danger," replied Freda; and forthwith she related the nocturnal attack of the disguised ruffians upon the house, and the gallant defence which Gilbert had made.

"Every attempt at explanation only increases the confusion," said Rupert, when she ceased speaking. "Why did he come in disguise? Why did he not say he was your uncle, and assert his right to protect you?"

"He was acquainted with Freddie in England," said Freda, demurely, but suggestively.

"Deeper and deeper still!" said Rupert, growing more and more bewildered. "That gave him a right to protect her also."

"But," continued Freda, with the same Quaker-

like simplicity, "probably he did not know there were two Winifreds at Mrs. Templeman's."

Gilbert moaned, and Freddie, who had hitherto succeeded in looking quite composed, blushed to the roots of her hair.

Rupert was silent for a few moments, while the truth gradually dawned upon him.

"Give me your hand, my boy," he said, in a low tone, "and forgive me for having pressed my questions so closely. You acted nobly. Now for this box," he continued, changing his tone and manner; "my Freda has convinced me that even to me it may prove to be a Pandora's box, since it gives me the hope of a life of quiet usefulness, brightened by the sunshine of her companionship. May you, my friends, be equally blessed, both through the contents of this casket, and with every happiness this world can afford you."

He raised the lid, and taking out the trays, displayed a selection of beautiful ornaments, which, little as any of them knew of such things, they were sure must be worth several thousand dollars.

"And now," said Gilbert, "let us talk about business. Which of these pretty things do you wish to sell, Freda?"

"*All*," replied Freda, emphatically, "except this little ring which my mother used to wear. I will keep that, and I wish Freddie to accept one."

"Let it be the plainest you can find, Freda," said Freddie; "because it is not for its marketable value, but as your gift that I shall prize it."

Freda selected a beautiful turquoise, which, after Freddie had put it on the third finger of her right hand, Gilbert begged leave to inspect. While doing so, he slipped it on his own little finger, before returning it.

"Why do you wish to sell them all, Freda?" asked her uncle; "would it not be better to sell only a part of them at first, and keep the rest, in case you might wish to wear them?"

"I shall *never* wish to wear them," she replied, with tears in her eyes and voice, "how *could* I, with so many painful associations connected with them?"

"You are right, love, quite right," he said; "the next question is, where can they be sold to the best advantage? I think they should be taken to New York; and, if you will intrust the matter to my management, I will start off at once."

This offer was joyfully accepted, and the following morning was fixed for his departure.

The day passed quickly away. Freda was constantly by Rupert's side, talking hopefully of the future. The appearance of a shadow on his brow, or the sound of a suppressed sigh, was the signal for renewed cheerfulness on her part. Freddie seconded her with consummate skill and tact; but the two girls, as though by mutual consent, avoided being left *tête-à-tête* for even a moment.

Gilbert was puzzled, and even felt rather annoyed that Freddie should show so little regret at the prospect of his absence for three, or possibly four weeks.

"Freda must be blessed with a remarkably buoyant disposition," he took an opportunity of remarking to Freddie, when he found himself alone with her; "she seems to have entirely got over the shock which she experienced this morning at the disclosure of her father's villainy, and to think no more of all the pain and disappointment which she felt bound to inflict, in consequence, upon the man who loves her so passionately. She was quite right in acting as she did, I cannot deny that; yet I should have expected she would have grieved about it a little; that is, if she had loved him. She seemed pleased, also, to find she had an uncle in the world; yet she don't care much about his going away for a month or two."

The gist of this speech lay in the closing sentence, which was aimed at Freddie herself.

"Are you so blind?" she said, looking reproachfully in his face; "if Freda gave way to weeping and wailing, what would become of Rupert? She does it for his sake; can't you see that, you owl? And I—heaven help me!—I'm trying all I can to support her, though I am miserable myself. And it's very cruel of you to say such things."

"Will you forgive me?" he asked, very humbly.

"You spoke unkindly about Freda; how can *I* forgive wrongs inflicted upon her?" retorted Freddie, beginning to fence.

"Are you sorry I am going away, Freddie?"

"You have no right to ask that question, Mr. Bracebridge," replied Freddie, with a great assumption of dignity.

"Will you give me the right?"

"Certainly not," she said, dogmatically; then added, *sotto voce*, "without being asked for it."

"Then I'll ask for it when I come back from New York," he said, taking one of Freddie's hands, and fondling it in both his own; "our poor friends will have got over the first smart of their sorrow by that time, and it wont be so confoundedly selfish to be happy. We understand one another, and that must suffice for the present; must it not, dear Freddie?"

"Mr. Bracebridge, you are extremely enigmatical," said Freddie, trying to look unconscious.

"Now, Freddie," exclaimed Gilbert, in a tone of grave reproof, "don't begin that sort of thing. Nature did not make you a coquette, but a noble woman, as strong and beautiful in soul as you are in body. Don't try to undo her work by affecting pettinesses of character that are unworthy of you, and altogether foreign to your true disposition. Will you give me one moment's private interview to-morrow before I start?"

"Yes," she answered, decisively.

He pressed her hand, and strode away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GILBERT'S JOURNEY.

GILBERT, understanding the rôle which the two girls were playing, aided them considerably that evening, as they sat in the moonlight on the piazza.

He gave the little party such a glowing description of a ranche which he had seen some months before, and which, before leaving San Francisco that morning, he had ascertained was still in the market, that even Rupert was roused to take an interest in his plans for purchasing and settling on it.

He dilated on the fertility of the soil, the picturesqueness of the landscape, the beauty of the cascade, and the value of the water-power, the abundance and size of the timber, and the facilities for building a house on an elevated plateau, where a delicious climate reigned throughout the year.

"The house of the present proprietor," he continued, "is built at the foot of the hill, so that he suffers from the intense heat of the summer; but we can let Sam Watson have that, and teach him how to cultivate tropical fruits for us, which we can enjoy in our eyrie."

"Sam Watson!" exclaimed Freda, "is he coming?"

"Yes, as soon as his leg is well enough to allow him to travel, he will bring on your horses. He wishes to settle here, and I promised to get work for him. I knew that Rupert would employ him, if I asked it. And, by the bye, Rupert, I gave him a whole packet of envelopes addressed to you, in which he is to send letters from different points of his journey, to acquaint you with his safety, and that of his precious charge. So you will probably have something to keep you lively while I am gone. Sam is an excellent house carpenter, and if we make him boss, and work under him, we shall not require much help besides."

"Make him *what?*" said Freda, in amazement.

"Boss," repeated her uncle.

"And what is boss?" asked Freda again.

There was a general laugh at her simplicity, and the meaning of the mysterious syllable was explained.

"You and I and Sam," continued Gilbert, "will have to rough it a little, and live in the old shanty till the house is up."

"And where are we to be all that time?" said Freda.

"You will have to stay where you are, I guess," replied Gilbert.

"And *I* guess we wont submit to such treatment; will we, Freddie?"

"Decidedly not," responded Freddie. "I want to have a share of the fun."

"Here's a pretty state of affairs!" exclaimed

Gilbert; "a regular woman's rights meeting got up on the first opportunity! What do you say to this, Rupert?"

"I second everything that they propose," said Rupert; "and beg that affairs may be so managed that we shall not be deprived of their society. In such a climate as you describe, with the shade of luxuriant trees, I think we might all live very comfortably under canvas until the house is built."

"Excellent!" said Gilbert.

"Delightful!" murmured Freda.

"Oh, Jolly!" exclaimed Freddie.

"Then I suppose you girls will be glad to see me back again," said Gilbert, rather maliciously; "though you are not disposed to break your hearts over my departure."

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed Freda, "it is positively wicked of you to say that. How can you expect me to appear anything but cheerful, and light-hearted, when you must know how happy I am in being once more with Rupert, after his going away and saying I should never see him again! Indeed I am *very* sorry that you should have to leave us so soon, and on my business too! Can you forgive me for being happy?"

"I can, and do, my child," he replied, tenderly, for he detected a quaver in her voice, which confirmed Freddie's assertion that her gayety was assumed for Rupert's sake. "Be as merry as you can, and take care that Rupert does not get another attack of fever. Your hands are hot and dry now,

my friend. As your doctor, I prescribe a warm bath, and bed. As your nurse, I'll go and prepare them for you. And you, young ladies, get you off to bed likewise, and secure your beauty sleep."

He hurried Freda's parting from her lover, under the pretence of carrying him off to the bath-room, and the two girls went into the chamber they were to occupy in common.

The murmur of voices from the adjoining room, which was that allotted to the use of Rupert and his friend, warned them to stifle their sobs, and to let no sound of grief be heard through the thin partition wall.

But their pantomime was expressive; and poor Freda's whispers were not the less heart-rending in their misery, because they were so low that Freddie could scarcely catch their meaning.

They were no sooner alone than Freda threw herself into her friend's arms, and wept convulsively, though in silence, while Freddie's sympathetic tears fell fast for company.

"O Freddie! How long is this dreadful struggle to go on? If Rupert would only loathe me, as I loathe myself, for being the child of such a man, then he would cease to love me, and I could die. But I must live on for his sake, though I know I have no right to live; for all that man's wickedness must be latent in my nature, and will show itself when the occasion calls it forth."

"Freda! Hold your tongue, or talk common sense! There is no wickedness in you! You are

an angel! A dear, suffering angel, cruelly punished for faults she never could so much as imagine could be committed by others—far less commit them herself."

"Oh, the shame seems more than I can bear!" moaned Freda.

"Think of your mother, darling! You resemble her—Rupert said so; and he said too that you were more beautiful, and had a superior mind, and more firmness of character than she had, good and beautiful as she was."

"He should not say such things," sobbed Freda, a little comforted nevertheless. "How can there be any good in me, with such a father?"

"He only spoke the truth," continued Freddie; "for Gilbert entirely agreed with him, and uncles don't flatter."

"If I were the only sufferer, I could bear my cruel lot more patiently," whispered Freda. "I had long suspected that *he* caused my mother's death, but until to-day I never realized all his villainy, nor thought that I inherited the disgrace of it. But when Rupert asked me to be his wife, I remembered Mrs. Templeman, and the image of that man seemed to rise up between him and me, and the shadow of his criminal life came over me, like a black cloud."

"When the first bitterness is past, the sacrifice will bring its own reward," said Freddie; "you will feel more and more that you have done right. And Rupert, when he is quite strong again, will help you

to be cheerful, instead of depending altogether upon your exertions, as he has done to-day."

"Poor Rupert!" sighed Freda. "When I think that he has to suffer for that other's crimes, my heart swells with rage and vindictiveness!"

"Then try not to think of it. Think, instead, how delighted you would have been, about this time last night, if you had known that you were within a few miles of Rupert, and that when once re-united, you would be his companion for the rest of your lives."

"And my dear uncle Gilbert would also have been delighted," said Freda, smiling, "could he have known that he had two Winifreds under his care, and that the one he saw at Chester was *not* his niece."

"Do you suppose he was under that mistake?" said Freddie, looking shy.

"How else can you account for his strange conduct throughout the journey? If we had not arrived here some hours earlier than he arranged it, and caught him asleep in the garden, he would have been off, no one knows where, and we might not have been able to find him, after we had discovered his mistake. Oh, there is still much—very much to be thankful for in this world, Freddie, darling! I have found a dear uncle, and my life with Rupert will be happy, as soon as I see him looking really cheerful; and you and Gilbert will be so blest that some of the sunshine from your lot will fall upon us, and crown us with joy. I have

been selfishly occupied with my own sorrows all this time—have you nothing to tell of your happiness, Freddie?"

"Not much," answered Freddie, blushing; "he said it was selfish to be very happy when one's friends were miserable; and I agreed with him, of course; and I managed to tell him all the bad about myself."

"The *bad!* What bad?" demanded Freda.

"About the Circus and all that," replied Freddie.

"What did he say?" asked Freda, anxiously.

"He just made fun of it altogether, and said it had done me no harm; and—and—he asked me to grant him a short interview to-morrow before he goes."

"Now I think I shall be able to sleep," said Freda, "for I have something pleasant to think of."

When their heads were on their pillows, Freddie kept up a gentle buzzing on the same topic until she fell asleep, and it was not long before Freda followed her example.

All were astir early in the morning. Rupert, much benefited by Gilbert's treatment, was going to accompany him to the city.

The horses were saddled; the jewels were placed in a gold-digger's belt, and fastened securely round Gilbert's waist; Freda and Rupert were talking, on the piazza, when Gilbert took Freddie's hand, and led her into a vacant room.

"Freddie," he said, "tell me frankly, do you know why I kept out of your sight on the journey?"

"I think," she stammered out, "you believed me to be your niece."

"Do you hate and scorn me for thinking so?"

"No, you acted honorably," she replied, with a burst of enthusiasm, "that is, if—"

"That's enough! Don't spoil it with an *if*," he exclaimed; then caught her in his arms, pressed one fervent kiss upon her lips, and was off without another word.

When Freddie recovered from her astonishment, and joined Freda on the piazza, the two horsemen were at some distance on the road.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PANDORA'S BOX.

THREE months have passed away, leaving in their train all the glories of the Californian spring.

A partially finished house stands on a plateau among the foot-hills of the Sierras, and beside it are two spacious tents.

A swing, that is half a hammock, hangs from the boughs of a magnificent red-wood tree, and in it lolls Freddie, toying with the empty jewel-case, and watching, almost sadly, the figure of Gilbert Bracebridge, as, mounted upon Sultan, he rapidly recedes along the road to San Francisco.

Watching the same object, but concealed by the trees and bushes from Freddie's sight, stand Rupert and Freda. He has recovered strength both of mind and body, and is now consoling and supporting her, as she leans, weeping, on his breast. It is the first time that she has given way, in his presence, to any violent exhibition of grief at their sad lot, and the present occasion may well excuse it.

Gilbert will bring back with him a marriage license and a minister, and he and Freddie will be married that evening.

It is no wonder that poor Freda feels, with double intensity, the bitterness of her own lot. She whispers, "Don't let Freddie know how mean and envious I am!" And Rupert wipes away her tears and tries to comfort her.

Freddie herself is not half satisfied. She feels as though she were taking an unfair advantage of her friends.

"Pandora's box!" she soliloquized. "I wish I could find any hope for them in the bottom of it. Nothing but crimson velvet;—not even the color of hope! The bottom is very thick. I really think there must be something hidden there."

The false bottom in her own trunk had, no doubt, given her some skill in such matters, for, after manipulating the sides and ornaments for a short time, she pressed a spring, and the bottom of the casket sprang up.

She looked eagerly into the cavity thus revealed, expecting to find some costly jewel, but she saw nothing but a letter, addressed to Winifred Trevanian. Knowing that this must have been written and placed there by the mother, for her daughter to read after she was dead, Freddie forbore to touch it, but carried the box to Freda, told her briefly, how she had discovered it, and turned to go.

"Stay, Freddie, dear," said her friend; "this can contain no secret that I would withhold from you."

She read it with a puzzled and frightened air.

Suddenly she burst into a wild fit of laughter, and pushing the letter into Rupert's hand, cried:

"Read! Read! And tell me what it's about! It is too good to be true! I can't believe it!"

Rupert encircled her with his arms, and she leaned on him, laughing and crying like a child.

"This was written by your mother, Freda," he said, solemnly.

"I know it! What is it she says? I cannot believe it!"

Rupert read as follows:

MY BELOVED CHILD:—May our merciful Father in His own good time, reveal to you the hiding-place in which I shall conceal this paper, and the two certificates which will prove the truth of what I state. Your father died in India when you were little more than three years old. His distant cousin, who bore the same name, induced, or I may say *compelled* me to marry him a few months afterwards. I was not to blame for this haste. I was in my soul faithful to the memory of my beloved husband; but I was alone among strangers, in a strange land, surrounded by enemies, and in terror for the safety of my child, I was in Randolph Trevanian's power. He was a wicked man, and I feared, but never loved him. He exercised a power over me which I could not resist. He made me promise never to tell you that he is not your father. I did not promise never to *write* it, and I pray to God that He will lead you to the discovery, for you will be happy in knowing that your real father was as good and noble, as this supposed one is vile and dishonorable. I write in dread of discovery. Your father collected these jewels for you. They were to be your dowry. Oh, that I may be able to preserve them for you! I keep them hidden in a secret place, for *he* uses every artifice to obtain possession of them. May God bless and protect my child, is the prayer of

Her unhappy mother,

ELLEN TREVANIAN.

"Thank God for this great mercy!" exclaimed Rupert. "Freddie! How can we thank you—"

But Freddie was gone. There lay the box, however, and in it the certificates, which proved the two marriages—one at Southampton, between Ellen Bracebridge and Randolph Trevanian, and the other, four years later, in India, between Ellen Trevanian, widow, and Randolph Ellerton Trevanian.

Freda had barely comprehended the full extent of her happiness, when a succession of wild outcries, accompanied by the firing of guns, drew them to the space in front of the house.

"Are we attacked by Indian savages?" cried Freda.

"No, no—those are not Indian voices," replied Rupert, hurrying on.

"*Oh!* (with tremendous crescendo), Mas'r Gilbert (diminuendo)," was uttered in the stentorian tones of Sam Watson.

Bang—bang—bang—went Gilbert's Winchester rifle, which was in Freddie's hands.

"*Oh!* Mas'r Gilbert!" with the usual crescendo and diminuendo effects, proceeded from the scarce less powerful lungs of Lindy, otherwise Lucinda—a sable damsel of whom Sam had become enamoured on his journey, and whom he had persuaded to marry him after a few days' courtship.

Bang went Sam's old gun. Then the rifle and the yells went off together, and Gilbert looked round. Shouts and firing were repeated. Seeing that something was amiss, he turned and re-ascended the steep road.

Half way up he met Freddie, wild with excite-

ment, and either unable, or perversely unwilling, to utter a coherent sentence from which he could divine the cause of the tumult.

"No harm has happened, I can see that in your face; but, in Heaven's name, what is it, Freddie?" he said, leaping from his horse, as he met her.

"'Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!'" sang Freddie, as she sprang into the vacant saddle. "'Could anybody have imagined such a thing! 'We'll go marching on!' It's all right at last! And I found it!"

"Found *what*, you provoking monkey?" said Gilbert, trying to snatch her down. But Sultan had caught the infection of her high spirits, and eluded his grasp by bounding forward, and carrying his mistress up the hill at a canter.

Gilbert followed with all speed, but only arrived, breathless, at the top, to be half smothered by Freda's embraces, while his right arm ran some risk of being dislocated by Rupert's energetic handshakings.

The truth at length dawned upon him, and then, for the first time, they comprehended how deeply he had sympathized with his niece and friend in their past trouble. His gravity sobered them all, for his heart was too full for loud rejoicing.

He read his sister's letter with deep emotion, and replaced it carefully in its hidden receptacle. Then the usual bright smile came back to his face, as, returning the casket to Freda, he said, "You thought you had sold all your jewels, Winifred; but the most precious one was left behind."

"I hope, Master Gilbert," said Sam, who was not without the feelings of inquisitiveness common to humanity, whether black or white, "that there was some very good news in that letter."

"So good, old friend," replied Gilbert, clapping him on the back, "that the result of it is, we shall have two weddings to-morrow, instead of one to-day."

THE END.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 071 296 8

2966

WINNIPEG JEWISH